

Foreword by
Dr. David Frawley



ESSENTIALS OF VEDIC WISDOM FOR BLISSFUL LIVING

U. Mahesh Prabhu

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Vedic Wisdom
for Blissful Living

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With

Dharali Sharma

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Vedic Management Centre
www.vedic-management.com

Vedic Management Centre

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First published in 2017

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Dedication

To Madhavmam (Late M. V. Kamath [1921 – 2014]), to whom I remain indebted for his confidence in me.

To Vamadeva ji (Dr. David Frawley), for his continuing support and enduring love as mentor and friend.

To Winston, for being my friend for all seasons

U. Mahesh Prabhu

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*To my parents, Manju and Arun Kumar Sharma, who are my first teachers
Rahul and Vrinda, for all the love
U. Mahesh Prabhu, for his confidence and support
Rachit Singh, I am a better person because of you
And to all extended family, friends, and teachers who have guided my path.*

Dharali Sharma

FOREWORD

Vedic wisdom is perhaps the most important system of knowledge for the future well-being of humanity and for the planet overall. It connects our human species to its higher purpose as an evolution of cosmic consciousness, without which we may be challenged to survive in this high-tech era and its artificial and complicated way of life.

Vedic knowledge occurs on two interrelated levels. The first level is knowledge of the human being, not just as a physical body, but as a manifestation of a higher awareness. Vedic knowledge is Self-knowledge, which is not merely knowledge of our physical or psychological selves, but of our true eternal nature beyond body and mind, time, space and *karma*.

The second level is knowledge of the universe, not just at an outer level, but at an inner level as a manifestation of consciousness on all levels from the subatomic to the supragalactic. These two levels of knowledge are ultimately one. The entire universe dwells in our own hearts as our own true nature. All the laws of nature and the universe work as one organic being, with the whole reflected in every part. Such a view of cosmic knowledge looks to a direct experience of universal truth within us. It is not merely knowledge of name, form or number. It is not merely an understanding of nature's forces or a manipulation of the external world, which always remains problematical. It directly perceives the entire world as part of our own greater being.

Vedic wisdom is not any mere outer information or data, such as our computers provide us with. To receive it requires not just getting more knowledge but changing who we are at a fundamental level. Accessing it rests upon a certain way of life and behavior defined by principles of *dharma* and right living. This means being in control of the mind and senses, letting go of the ego, and not pursuing the material world and personal enjoyment as our primary way of life.

Vedic wisdom calls us to move beyond desire, greed and attachment, renouncing our arrogance of knowing and trying to control life and instead

surrendering to the Divine presence behind nature's wonders. It requires truthfulness, honesty, self-discipline, selflessness and a respectful receptivity to the wisdom of the sages.

While people today can easily read books and articles and grasp complex ideas and detailed information, such a behavioral basis to approach higher consciousness is rare and requires a great deal of work on oneself in order to achieve. Such behavioral changes are the essence of the traditional practice of *Yoga* that is rooted in *yamas* and *niyamas* or principles and practices of right living starting with truthfulness and non-violence (*satya* and *ahimsa*).

Vedic wisdom is not another fad, psychological approach or religious belief. It requires deep introspection within and profound contemplation of nature without, allied with a willingness to transform ourselves according to a higher will and awareness. Yet this makes it more powerful and lasting in its results, which is to unfold our deepest potentials.

In their current book, *Essentials of Vedic Wisdom for Blissful living*, Mahesh Prabhu and Dharali Sharma endeavor to present Vedic wisdom in a simple, yet clear and profound manner that the modern reader can easily access, for whom the Vedic vision and way of life, with its very different background, may initially be hard to understand. Such transcriptions of Vedic wisdom without compromising its essence are very important today when the social media is flooded with misleading information and limited views of reality.

Each chapter of the book provides a different perspective on Vedic living that can be used as a doorway to enter into a broader Vedic understanding of who we truly are – which is much more than even our current science and technology has yet imagined. Such writings are best slowly read and contemplated in order to properly appreciate and absorb.

U. Mahesh Prabhu is a noted teacher and author in the field of Vedic management. Dharali Sharma is a highly qualified economic as well as financial consultant. Together they aim to bring this powerful Vedic approach to the public and to sincere individuals and groups throughout the world. This book represents the initial presentation of their ideas and helps us understand their values and way of thought. The Vedic Management Center is a new organization developed by them to address these issues and

provide guidance on how to develop a Vedic way of life that is both many-sided and sustainable. The organization is likely to grow rapidly in the years to come.

Vedic management, to put it simply, is a life managed according to Vedic wisdom and Vedic principles of right living, addressing individual and collective, private and public levels. These approaches are explored in detail from various angles in Vedic disciplines like *Yoga*, *Ayurveda* and *Vedanta*. Vedic wisdom requires a Vedic life, which is a life lived according to a universal vision. The current book can serve a good contemporary introduction to this transformative process of *Vedic* wisdom that is beneficial to all.

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March 2017

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Introduction

“The Vedas were composed thousands of years ago, so why should we bother studying or understanding their outdated teachings? On the contrary, science and technology have transformed our world in ways that are easy to see. We live surrounded by modern luxury and comfort, something Vedic people would have probably only dreamed of. Given this fact, is there anything truly worthwhile to learn from ancient Vedic wisdom?” Thoughts like these must have certainly crossed your mind, making you sceptical towards any Vedic teachings.

It is true that science and technology have transformed our lives like never before. However, on deeper introspection we find that many things in life remain the same, with unhappiness and sorrow touching us all. Diseases of the past have given way to complex diseases today, some new to medical science, with more of us relying on daily medications to deal with them. People suffered pain in the past just as they do today, perhaps for different reasons. There was love then as there is today, however our relationships seem to have become more fragile. There was hate then, and certainly enmity is very common today.

Our external reality may be vastly better than it was in the past but our inner feelings have not changed very much. Fear, desire, anger, difficulties in relationships, the struggle and stress of daily living still plague us. One wonders if we are happier than the people of yore, or simply more busy and preoccupied. We have improved our outer appearance but our inner issues

remain the same. In fact, today we seem less capable of dealing with difficulties or finding any lasting peace of mind.

Hence, contrary to the belief that science and technology have transformed our lives in a qualitative manner – we are still in most respects the same type of human beings with similar experiences of love and hate, and the yearning for something transcendent to deliver us from our unhappiness to lasting bliss.

Given this scenario most people have found different methods of dealing with the various crises that life seems to throw at them; support groups, therapies, drugs, new age philosophies, yoga, consumerism, travel and what have you. All of these are methods of dealing with the existential crisis that seems to have gripped most people once the basic needs of survival are met. Work-life balance, stress management, and mental health seem to be the key words for the era.

But where or how does Vedic wisdom come into this discussion? Is it another repackaging and selling of old goods or maybe Hinduism's own form of fundamentalism? After all what benefit can out of date rituals and traditions offer the modern stressed out time strapped man or woman.

Yet, Vedic wisdom can play an important part in the mental health and lifestyle discussion, how you might ask?

Firstly, Vedic wisdom is neither a diktat nor a single form of thinking, it encompasses different philosophies, includes a range of texts dealing from the most philosophical discussions “Why am I here?” to the mundane aspects “Which diet plan might best suit me?”. It is all encompassing and specific to the individual.

One might be surprised and even sceptical to this argument; it almost seems too good to be true.

Perhaps we can start with answering this question: Who am I? Yes, the most philosophical, yet yawn producing question. Philosophy might say, I think, therefore I am. Any method of inquiry would say, I am a name, a body, a personality, or at the very least a combination of nature & nurture.

Yet are we all of these, one of these or even none of these?

A name is only an identification given to your body, something we do not even select for ourselves. Can't you change your name if you wish?

Look at a picture of yourself when you were ten years old. Now look at yourself today. You see dissimilarities, don't you? And yet, it is the same person – YOU! But both bodies are different in so many ways. Aren't they? So, what is enabling you to connect the body of the ten year old with your body today as being the same person?

Did you say that it is your mind that has stayed the same? Certainly, your ideas and emotions are no longer those of a ten year old. Perhaps, it is some deeper aspect of your mind? Alright, now imagine you are in a deep sleep without any trace of a dream. Your thinking mind is virtually non-existent in that state. Does that imply that you do not exist? If not, then do you still exist even when your mind is in a dormant or even in a comatose state? Do you still want to believe that you are only the mind?

Take this further; your mind is constantly changing with numerous shifting thoughts, emotions and sensations. Most of these you gladly forget, some become core memories that remain with you as a personality. Clearly you are more than any one of your thoughts, yet you are also more than the totality of your thoughts. You are always capable of more thoughts. What is

the constant factor in your awareness behind this play of emotions, information, concepts, memories and speculations that you regard as yourself or as your mind?

You may want to argue that all of these are hypothetical questions and that they aren't needed in a rationalist setup. Think again. Rationalism is all about looking at things with a rationale or reason that rests upon our actual experience. You don't accept anything as true just because some book, institution or individual says so. Therefore, use a similar rationale for answering the quintessential question "Who am I?"

In the sphere of scientific understanding, one must understand the tools, and environment while taking the time to answer specific questions. This is the approach of the scientific mind. Wherein knowing is everything!

While, you claim to know your body, mind and environs – you know nothing about you, what does it make of you or of your life or identity if you cannot answer that question? People fear that which they don't know. Therefore, the scientific spirit of inquiry suggests that you should try to understand who you really are, or the relevance all other form of knowledge is questionable as well.

Our reality is an individual truth that we attach value and meaning to, if we are unsure of whom we are; how can we do justice to the problems we face?

This question, while philosophical also begs us to ask the next question, what constitutes a scientific process? Does individual knowing constitute the only reliable form of knowledge.

Vedic systems such Nyaya and Mimamsa answer these very questions on what is an investigative process, and what are the various forms of knowledge. While, Sankhya seeks to answer questions such as “Who am

I?” and “Where do I come from?”; the very basis of the modern scientific thought is found in texts which are thousands of years old.

Vedic sages contemplated deeply and discovered answers to many fundamental questions of life. When they found the answers, they also found an extraordinary value behind them. They designed systems and methodologies that made the truth replicable, methods that are practised even today. They took this knowledge and compiled it into the various Vedic texts, including Vedas, Vedanta, Aranyaks, Shastras, Shatakas and the like.

Beyond the profound questions of life, they also sought to enhance the aesthetics of life and simplify daily existences. A prime example is the use of spices e.g. Turmeric, which researchers have found to be preventive against a host of diseases. Prevalence of turmeric in Indian cuisine can be attributed to it being found across the country. Another example is the use of copper and its alloys, besides a tradition of drinking copper charged water, it is found in various utensils in every Hindu household; research has found copper to be anti bacterial besides aiding neurological functions and other benefits. These and more examples are consistently found in Hindu day-to-day living which begs the question that perhaps a deeper understanding of nature pervades the life of the average Hindu which cannot be explained as coincidence.

Vedic wisdom has much to offer society; proponents of Vedic wisdom are continually peaceful; neither elated nor in sorrow. They neither brood about the past nor worry about the future. They are found doing all the good they can in whatever way possible – without any sense of pride, greed or power. They do not seek publicity or awards for their accomplishments - their state of absolute consciousness itself is their accomplishment, as well as the

reward. They aren't always Yogis meditating in the Himalayas or doing Yoga exercises. They may live among the common masses like a lotus flower arising from the mud – untainted by the vagaries of life.

A lack of proponents and teachers does however plague the spread of this knowledge. Yet the most pervasive and damaging phenomenon is the rigid mindset, which denies the benefits of Vedic thought. Preconceived views and mental conditioning at times prevents us from exploring the goldmine of wisdom that is the Vedas and Shastras. While professing love for the scientific theory, it is not employed to examine Vedic wisdom. Words such as Dharma, Guru and Karma have been reduced to clichés unfortunately when their meaning is the most important.

Vedic philosophies do not merely explain the ills facing our society but also offer pragmatic solutions to create a better world through a higher awareness. However, since they have been reduced to mere religious beliefs, we consider them either as objects of worship or a matter of ridicule. It is only when we study the Vedic wisdom without detachment, with neither reverence nor disregard, that we can know the world in ways we've never considered possible, along with attaining solutions to the most critical problems facing humanity today. But are we willing to give Vedic wisdom a chance, by investing some time to seriously and objectively examine it?

1

THE VEDAS

Books of wisdom

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The Vedas are a vast set of spiritual teachings dating from the dawn of civilizations. They are the source of original ideas from where various Indic religions including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism originate. It won't be wrong to suggest that Vedas have shaped ideologies as well as philosophies of every major faith on earth. The Vedas also contain keys to the Pre-Christian traditions of all Indo-European peoples – the Greeks, Romans, Celts, Germans and Slavs – whose ancient languages and cultures resemble the Vedic. They reflect the ancient sun based religions and enlightenment traditions that once dominated the world from Mexico to China.

The Vedic principles are based on the deepest insight into spiritual wellbeing and self-knowledge – the unity of the individual *Atman* with that of every other being across the universe. They teach us that there is only One Self in the universe, in which there is bliss and liberation from the cycle of karma and rebirth. Vedic knowledge expands from this central point and helps us to understand the meaning of our entire existence on all levels including the physical body and the world of nature. Vedic science represents an integral spiritual science, necessary to bring about true world peace. It provides both knowledge of our True Self as well as that of the conscious universe in which we live, revealing all the secrets of nature and

natural law. As such, it is probably the most important body of knowledge for all humanity.

The Four Vedas

The Vedas as we know them today were compiled into books by a *Rishi* (sage) known as *Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa* also known as *Vyasa* or *Veda Vyasa*, for his magnanimous effort in compiling various texts in Vedas and then structuring it accordingly. He took the wisdom and knowledge of all the sages at the time and those preceding them and structured it into books.

There are four Vedas; namely: *Rig Vedas*, *Yajur Veda*, *Sama Veda* and *Atharva Veda*.

The *Rig Veda* is the oldest of the four Vedas and presents the key wisdom of the ancient *Rishis* (Vedic sages). It is the most important Vedic text and from which all other texts are derived from or are based upon. The *Yajur Veda* presents the Vedic ritual, which inwardly is a practice of *Yoga* involving speech, breath and mind. About a third of its mantras are from the *Rig Veda*. The *Sama Veda* is the Veda of music and song showing the ecstasy of Self-realization. The *Atharva Veda* provides additional insights and wisdom for particular issues including healing. It contains many mantras from both the *Rig* and *Yajur Vedas*, as well as many of its own.

Also, Vedas are not works delivered by God through prophets. They are realized truths by the revered sages also called *Rishis* and *Munis*. These sages were the ones who had learned the truths through constant introspection and experience.

The *Brahmanas* and *Aranyakas*, *Upanishads* and *Gita* The *Brahmanas* provide ritualistic interpretations of *Vedic* knowledge that also reflect *yogic* practices, much like the *Yajur Veda*. The *Aranyakas* extend this knowledge

on a meditational level. There are numerous and long *Brahmana* texts, notably *Taittiriya* and *Satapatha*, but only a few *Aranyakas*, notably *Taittiriya* and *Aitareya*.

The *Upanishads* are clearest and most understandable portion of the mysterious *Vedas*. They present the spiritual secret of the *Vedas*, the knowledge of the *Atman* and *Paramatman*. They contain many yogic secrets as well. There are over a dozen old *Upanishads* of the late Vedic period with over a hundred *Upanishads* from later times.

Upavedas and Ayurveda

There are four *Upavedas* or Secondary *Vedas* of which the most important is *Ayurveda* or Vedic medicine. The others are *Dhanur Veda* (martial arts), *Sthapatya Veda* (Architecture) and *Gandharva Veda* (Music). *Ayurveda* is not just a medical system but shows us how to find harmony in terms of body, mind and soul, thereby extending into physical, psychological and spiritual wellbeing. Knowing our individual Ayurvedic constitution and the appropriate life-style for it we can maximize the potential of our being and attain a full life. *Ayurveda* has many classical texts like *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and the *Ashtanga Hridaya* of *Vagbhata*.

Yoga

Yoga is the practice of *Vedic knowledge* that develops our inner faculties through meditation, leading us ultimately to Self-realization. While there are many forms of *Yoga*, the main classical system is the eightfold or *Ashtanga* system which constitutes the *Raja Yoga* of *Patanjali*. This in turn reflects older traditions found in the *Mahabharata*, *Puranas*, *Upanishads* and *Vedas*. *Raja Yoga* is an integral science of *asana*, *pranayama*, *mantra* and *meditation* based upon *dharmic* living principles. It is popular as a form

of physical exercise in the West today but that is only one of its main aspects.

Vedanta

Vedanta is the practical philosophy that arises from the *Upanishads* and systematizes their teachings. Its *Advaita* or non-dualistic form, such as found in the works of *Adi Shankaracharya*, teaches the unity of the *Atman* (roughly put – soul) and the Supreme Self (*Paramatman*) or Absolute (*Brahman*) beyond time, space and *karma*. Devotional philosophies of *Vedanta*, like those of *Ramanuja*, *Madhva* and *Chaitanya*, emphasize the Divine as the Supreme Person (*Purushottama*).

Itihasa-Purana

These are encyclopaedias of sacred knowledge and stories, covering all aspects of life and culture. There are about twenty *Puranas* and two *Itihasas*, the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, the stories of *Krishna* and *Rama*. The *Bhagavad Gita* a revered text in itself, is a part of the *Mahabharata*, and is a discourse on the various forms of Yoga among other topics. *Yoga*, *Vedanta* and *Ayurveda* are common topics in them, often explained in great detail. The *Puranas* are probably the most extensive and profound yet neglected spiritual literature coming out of India.

2

THE TRUE NATURE OF VEDIC WISDOM

Beyond theist, atheist and agnostic ideas.

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Traditional view on religion divides along the lines of belief into theist, atheist and agnostic. Theists are those who consider God to be a power or presence who is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. There also are some theists who think God is the one who resides in heaven and relays his message(s) through prophets, angels, and good omens from time to time.

Atheists are the people who don't believe in the idea of God. They believe all things can be explained by scientific thought and rationale - alone. They also have deeper disagreements, resentment and at times, hatred towards Theists. Often these feelings are mutual.

However, theists do have a reverence towards an external source, which here is the scientific principle. The scientific principle could be argued is a doctrine that follows certain principles and relies on experiential truth that is not replicable by all. For example, most high level scientific experiments are done in premier institutions by scientists, whose findings the common man takes for granted as facts. These facts do tend to change with time, context and better experimental methodologies.

Agnostics are those set of people who think atheists and theists, are true as well as false in certain aspects. Refraining from committing to either doctrine, they question the blind faith of theist and the excessive reliance on physical proof of the atheist. For them, just because a supreme being is not knowable does not imply it cannot exist.

But what, or who, is God that forms the bone of contention in the first place? If you go by popular definition (in Christianity and other monotheistic religions) God is presented as the creator and ruler of the universe and source of all moral authority; the Supreme Being. He is in certain other religions such as paganism, a superhuman being or spirit worshiped as having power over nature and /or human fortunes; a deity. What is agreed by both groups is that God is responsible for all occurrences. Strange but true, is that even Atheists have concepts like the 'God particle'.

If – at all – God exists, he should be the one who is responsible for birth as well as the death of all beings on earth and other planets. He, therefore, would be someone who is neither born nor can die at any time. Gods can't bleed. An ancient Greek saying further implies that had Gods bled, none would believe in them, after all, of what use are the gods who bleed and suffer like other humans?

Let's take a while to find out why people want to, or don't want to believe in the idea of God. People who believe in God are those who have problems which are beyond their understanding and, therefore, a solution to the said problems is outside their reach or capabilities. In their desperate state, they are willing to resort to any means to solve their issues. They, therefore, pray, worship and do penance so as to appease that all-pervading being to get them out of the rut. For some there was nothing to lose with this

thinking; unanswered prayer could leave them no worse than they were, if anything the temporary glimmer of hope might even give them the will to exist.

For other people, unanswered prayers left them cynical and jaded. Prayers and penance are propagated by institutions, who claim to have the approval of the god(s). These institutions many a time use coercive force – emotional as well as physical – to ensure that their adherents are following their faith. When people don't get the desired answers to their prayers; these institutions make (or force?) them to believe that the problem lies in them. When the problem is resolved, the credit is given to the institution of God. So technically, the individual is either the damned or the saved – but never the hero. So, whatever he does is possible only with 'grace' of the divine.

Strange as it may sound, these institutions have existed across civilizations for thousands of years. Since they don't have complete answers to the questions they have moral or religious policing systems where, sometimes, use of brutal force, too, is authorized by citing prophets, scriptures or 'holy books'. The scriptures themselves mostly were written and understood by councils who had 'divine blessings' – the clergy. Many great wars in human history have been fought in the name of God by those who believe in God. The problem is that their perceptions about God were so different that it was almost impossible for them to prove His superiority except by waging 'holy' wars and winning over the heretics, apostates, and/or renegades.

It was mainly owing to the disillusionment with such 'holy' wars, which caused the absolute destruction of humanity, that a great many began rethinking on the ideas and ideals of religion. Eventually, they were so disillusioned that they began to disregard the very idea of God. After all, if there really was something, or someone, like God would he allow such

dastardly acts like war, rape, and murder in his name? Why doesn't He intervene when injustice happens? Theists' ideas and philosophies like 'test of God' didn't go down well with these people giving rise to new age philosophies some of which were extremely hedonist in nature.

Today the world is heavily divided. The division isn't just between Theists, Atheists, and Agnostics, but also among themselves. Hatred, envy as well as a sense of grudge is phenomenal and is the core reason why the world is on the verge of next world war.

So, is there a way to understand and learn or unlearn this idea and ideal of God? The answer is yes. This answer, however, is found in what could be better understood as Vedic scriptures. Unfortunately, *Vedas* are today known as Hinduism's Holy Scriptures. It's indeed a travesty that not many Hindus understand what *Vedas* are all about. Although, they take great pride in it; they know very little about it. While it is read, it is probably not always understood. In Hindu temples, Vedic hymns are recited dutifully. They believe that just by recitation their troubles will be eliminated. Vedic literature is in Sanskrit, a language that is by far the most complex in its structure. Those who claim to know Sanskrit don't have a hold on any other modern day language – especially English. Thus, a significant amount of misinterpretations has crept in thereby eclipsing the understanding of their true wisdom.

Dharma is mistranslated as religion, *Karma* as destiny and *Devas* as demi-gods. *Arya* seems to refer to the Aryan race. Such translations have essentially, not just muddied, but even killed the core Vedic ideas and ideals. Consequently, reducing the *Vedas* and the Vedic wisdom contained in them to another self-serving religious scripture.

Vedic teachings, knowledge, as well as wisdom, has never sought to divide people. They are probably still the only scripture which at the very beginning say “Let good thoughts comes from all parts of the Universe.” They seldom claim superiority. They wish health, wealth, and prosperity for all the beings – without any mark of distinction or discrimination. Almost all religions in the world propose the idea of good and bad. The good is promised to those who follow them; rest are damned to hell. Vedas does not follow such a principle. Yet, they are called ‘religious scriptures’ or ‘holy book’ and not books of wisdom, science, and works of eternal wellbeing.

Devas of *Vedas* are not certainly demi-Gods or God. They are elements of Nature. Vedic wisdom has a subtle explanation of human existence. Human bodies are made possible by a combination of five gross elements (*Pancha Mahabhootas*), namely; *Agni* (Fire), *Prithvi* (Earth), *Vayu* (Air), *Toyam* (Water) and *Akasha* (Space). Elements here do not refer to chemical elements but to the intrinsic nature of matter. On a closer look, all these elements are found in the human body in subtle ways.

Agni (Fire) refers to the property of heat, light, the ability of converting substances into finer forms; in humans this can be the ability to digest food as well as ideas. Quite literally, body temperature is an indication of the wellness of the body.

Toyam (Water) refers to the fluidity in thought as well as the property of blood to flow.

Vayu (Air), life forms exist because of the ability to respire. In human bodies there are empty spaces in the digestive tracts, which enable the function of absorption. Interestingly, an aspect of *Vayu* is the creative thought process, while an excess would lead to ungroundedness or being an “airhead”.

Prithvi (Earth) refers to stability, which can be that of bones or as a personality trait.

Akasha (Space), the most esoteric, can be thought of as the presence of any body. In scientific terms all matter occupies space.

This understanding of all forms of life in terms of the five elements forms the basis of *Ayurveda* (The knowledge of life or life principle). *Ayurveda* is a holistic process that defines good health not as the absence of disease but as a state, in which a person is balanced in mind, body, & spirit, is full of cheer and in whom appetite is balanced with all biological systems and natural urges working properly.

Ayurveda and *Yoga* essentially find their roots in the Vedas.

All these elements (*Pancha Mahabhootas*) are further associated in the human bodies through *Indriyas* (sense perceptions) and are under the purview of *Indra*, who is called King of *Devas* or *Devendra*. Without *Indra*, these elements will disintegrate and cause destruction. *Indra* is therefore very important for our existence. So, as you see it's completely wrong to call *Devas* as deities or demi-gods, let alone 'gods'. They are merely the elements of human existence. Yes, they are honoured and respected for without them our material existing is naught! But *Aradhana*, commonly mistaken to be worship, (better translated as a remembrance, respect as well as adoration) is not as same as worship in other religions. Similarly, all material things that are gifted by nature making lives of humans possible are called *Deva*, *Devi* (feminine form) or *Devatas* (plural). They are not gods as suggested by religious ideas.

Ganga, the mightiest of the river of the Indian subcontinent that has nurtured mankind for thousands of years is called *Devi*. Mountains like *Sahyadri*, *Niligiri* as well as *Meru* are called *Deva*. Any element of nature is

identified as either *Devi* or *Devata* in Vedic literature. They are revered as well as respected.

Yet, Vedic wisdom identified all these natural elements as material ones. They too are time bound. All that is born in the world is bound to die. Change is the only constant. So, the Vedic seers and sages made significant efforts to identify that thing which is neither born nor dead. That, which is eternal. And this is how they arrived at the concept of *Atman*. *Atman* is yet another word that is often mistranslated as soul. *Atman* can be better understood as the conscious energy within all living being that allows them to understand, learn, experience and do things. It is, in essence beyond the mind and limitations of thought. It is like any other energy; it can neither be created nor destroyed only converted from one form into another. In the case of *Atman*, it is reincarnated from one body into body. Body by itself is subject to change, death and decay, the *Atman* is not.

While *Atman* is, the conscious energy within an individual – *Paramatman* is the sum of the all the consciousness energy across the world. *Paramatman* is often mistranslated as God.

Hinduism is often believed to be polytheistic, with numerous gods. This is not so, in the Vedic philosophy (which is the root of Hindu religion), all gods and goddesses are aspects of that *Paramatman*. For the lay person revering the consciousness that underlies all creation can be a difficult task. Giving a form to the formless, thus making the *Paramatman* accessible to all, was the reason for the seemingly endless pantheon of deities. Worship of these deities was then a means by which the devotees could expand their consciousness and inculcate within their personalities aspects of their chosen deities. For example, intellectuals or people in creative pursuits worship *Saraswati*, the deity of learning and creativity, while one could

then make an argument for worshipping any scientist or musician, the said scientist or musician would still have human failings. *Saraswati*, on the other hand personifies the best of creation, without moral failings, with her worship devotees engage those aspects into themselves. Vedic philosophy at its heart expounds the awareness of greater consciousness. What better way to make it accessible, than to bring aspects of that consciousness and its possibilities into everyday life and also make festivals around it. *Mantra* (sounds), *Tantra* (method) and *Yantra* (object, diagrammatical representations) were the means by which any deity could be brought into the life of the devotee. Deity worship is in itself a study, with the form of the *Moorthi* (not idol, it is not just a statue), method of worship, and stories surrounding them having an esoteric meaning and specific purpose. The goal of worship was to eventually expand the devotee's consciousness such that he saw the eternal, omnipotent power in all beings and creation. There is no concept of heaven or hell in the Vedas, instead it is an exposition of the power of the individual to define his own life and create a good life (heaven if you will) and bad life (hell if you prefer). Becoming a god is not the goal, but to expand consciousness such that one is in communion with the entire existence is the objective.

Following this understanding of God, heaven, hell and other concepts from the Vedic standpoint, we can now look into what the Vedas say about human existence. Are we only a body or is there more to us?

THE ULTIMATE POWER IS WITHIN

Who are you? Where do you come from? Where will you go from here?

*

Vedic teachings emphasize understanding and realizing the *Atman* also called *Purusha* (when *Atman* is in a physical body) While “Soul” could also be a translation of this word, as it is “the spiritual or immaterial part of a human being or animal, regarded as immortal”, the much better word to understand *Atman* is “Consciousness”. Understanding this consciousness and, harnessing it with wisdom for universal welfare is the supreme objective of Vedic knowledge and practices. Vedic wisdom emphasises the importance of the *Atman* over the body.

Management is understood in the modern context as the “process of dealing with or controlling things or people.” In the Vedic perspective, management is first about understands oneself, then bettering oneself before endeavouring to create a better world. As the Vedic saying goes “By understanding the gold we can make many things of it; like chain, ring and bracelet. Similarly, by understanding the *Atman*, you can understand and help everyone.” This is because the *Atman* is the universal consciousness that finds expression in different forms such as different people, when one understands the *Atman*, he can understand all living beings, as it is the same consciousness in all.

There are three important declarations in Vedic wisdom, namely: *Pragyanam Brahma* (Knowledge is *Brahma*), *Tat Tvam Asi* (You are that) and *Aham Bhrahmasmi* (I am *Brahman*). The entire wisdom of the Vedic scriptures can be comprehended through these three declarations. *Brahma*

here refers to the supreme reality behind and beyond the entire universe and all individual creatures within it ***Pragyanam Brahma (Knowledge is Brahman)***: *Gyana Yoga* (Path of Knowledge) is one of the most significant paths prescribed to achieve liberation in Vedic teachings. Without this higher knowledge, there can be no liberation from pains and problems; there's only suffering. Only through understanding ourselves can we understand the world; knowledge, therefore, is the key.

Tat Tvam Asi (You are that): One of the most common occurrences in various conflicts around the world today is the blame game. Nobody wants to accept their own faults and, on the contrary, they put the blame on their opponents. When the blame is elsewhere we accept ourselves as the oppressed rather than the culprits. We detach ourselves from utilizing any opportunities we may have to set things right; because we assume that there's nothing to be fixed from our end. Given this, the situation worsens and liberation from our pains seldom happens.

Therefore, only by accepting the responsibility for our own situation can we ever stand a chance to fundamentally change it. This acceptance comes through wisdom. Once this wisdom is achieved, we can realize our innate and full potential. We realise that we are that universal consciousness that guides all reality.

Aham Brahmasmi (I am the Brahma): *Brahma* is depicted in Hindu mythology as a four faced, white bearded old man who sits on a lotus emanating from the navel of *Vishnu*. However, *Brahma*, has multifaceted meaning in *Sanskrit* language. *Brahma* also means the Supreme Consciousness out of which everything arises, the very source of creation. On realizing our full potential through *Pragyanam Brahma* and accepting our role as a bringer of change – *Tat Tvam Asi* – we soon realize that for all

the creation or destruction around us we ourselves are responsible. We realize that it's not elsewhere where we need to look for enlightenment; it is the light within us that can enlighten our world as well as the world around us.

Atman has both individual and universal aspects. *JivaAtman* (individual consciousness) is a part of *Paramatman* (universal consciousness) and, therefore, *Atman* is also called as *Kshetrajna* (Universal consciousness situated in an individual body).

Atman can also be understood as Energy – that which is neither created nor destroyed. It can only be converted (in case of *Atman*, reincarnate into another form) from one form to another. This implies that *Atman* resides in the body; but is not the body. Pain, pleasure, desire, greed, anger, lust and aspirations are limited to the body – these are born in the bodies and thereby die with it. But *Atman* is clearly beyond the body.

A great many life-style diseases that are affecting humanity, including Hypertension, Diabetes and Debility are essentially due to stress. When the mind is stressed, the body is stressed and eventually such diseases occur. However, stress exists only with a false sense of attachment to the body. This sense of attachment comes from the assumption that we are the body. But are we?

Just for a second try to remember yourself when you were ten years younger. Look at your own older photograph. How did you look? Compare that photo with yourself in the mirror. Do you look the same? I bet not. Science tells us that the body we had when we were a child, teenager, middle aged, or old aged are different. You are not the same body. Yet, you relate to it. You think this is how I looked when I was of that age; but then most of the cells that were in your body have changed and what you have

now is a body that is very different. So, what's the consciousness in you which enables you to connect with these two set of bodies and feel that you are the same person? In Vedic scripture that is *Atman*.

Once you realize that you are *Atman* or pure consciousness you understand that you do not just outlive the various cells in your body but also this entire bodily existence. It's a common wisdom that all that is born must die; but Vedic wisdom introduces to the greater aspect – all that dies must be born again. The entire universe is a process of creation as well as destruction. From creation emanates destruction and from destruction comes new creation.

When you realize this eternal truth – you are no more afraid of negative experiences, loss or even catastrophe. You are more prepared for the challenges of life. Difficult events seldom bother you and you are happy within, without any trace of stress, strain or pain. With this happiness, you embark on a path that instils not just prosperity but also perpetual bliss. You create a better world, first for yourself and then for everyone around you. You find your inner consciousness within all people and in the entire universe.

Wisdom of *Atman* (*Atma Bodha*) teaches us that every individual is potentially divine. And every *Atman* has within it the power to influence the world in its own way. The consequences are positive when the wisdom of *Atman* is known; negative when ignorance prevails. This is the reason why *Vidya* (knowledge) is also understood as the realization of the *Atman* in the Vedas.

All the greatest contribution of Vedic wisdom, including *Ayurveda* and *Yoga*, are built on the foundation of *Atma Gyaan* (knowledge of the self). A person who has known his own self will know the world and make it a

better place for everyone. Therefore, the Vedic seers proclaim, “Know yourself to know the world; Change yourself and realize your true nature – before you embark on a grand conquest to change the world.” Because that which ails us invariably ails the world.

Once we have understood our true nature, how do we then live in this world? Is there a method by which both we and the world at large can be benefited?

DHARMA

Not religion, but that which sustains and yields peace and prosperity.

*

Dharma is often mistranslated as religion. Why? Because, when the western scholars and theologians tried understanding the Vedas they approached it from their own Semitic point of view, i.e. in sync with Semitic holy books, namely: Koran, Bible and Torah.

To understand the concept of *Dharma*, one needs to know certain concepts. These are

- Meaning of Dharma as per the different *rishis* (Vedic sages)
- The 4 *ashrams* (stages) of life vis-a-vis the division of society against which *Dharma* can be done

As per the *Mahabharata* says: It is most difficult to define *Dharma*.

Dharma is explained to be that which helps in the upliftment of [all living beings]. Therefore, that which ensures the welfare of all living beings is surely *Dharma*. The learned *rishis* (sages) have said that that which sustains is *Dharma*.

Dharma sustains the society, it maintains the social order, ensures well-being and progress of humanity; *Dharma* is surely that which offers ways to fulfil these objectives.

Jaimini, the author of *Purvamimansa* and *Uttaramimamsa*, explains: *Dharma* is that which is indicated by the Vedas as conducive to the greater good.

Madhvacharya in *Parashara Smriti*: *Dharma* is that which sustains and ensures progress and welfare of all in this world... *Dharma* is promulgated in the form of advice – positive and negative – *Vidhi* and *Nishedha*.

Vidhi is the advice given to suggest positive actions, and can simple acts such as rising early in the morning. *Nishedha* is advice given in negation form, one must not steal. Both these are again the starting points from which one develops greater consciousness, so as to lead a *Dharmic* life. Eventually, the goal is that one moves beyond advice and develops enough insight to decide on action as per the situation.

Dharma, therefore, can also be understood as an individual's moral duty, acts of kindness to the worthy, rightful punishment to the deserving and serving organizations and institutions that is committed to the eternal welfare of all beings without any divide. *Dharma* is also universal compassion. Therefore, *Dharma* is verily the root of sustainable peace and prosperity. *Dharma* is then a noun, from which an action follows. As an adjective, leading a *Dharmic* life, sustains both the person and society.

Having understood *Dharma* the following questions arise, what is one's *Dharma*? How can one best sustain himself and society?

As per the Vedas, life was divided into 4 *ashrams* or stages. An *ashram* is place of refuge; similarly the various stages of life offered an individual refuge and shelter.

As per Vedic sages every person went through following states of life, namely: *Baalya* (Childhood), *Brahmacharya* (Student) and *Grihastha* (Householder), *Vanasprastha* (Renunciation) which lead into *Sanyaas*.

During *Baalya* (Childhood) an individual went about playing and trying to understanding things in its own way. They are attached to their mother,

father and siblings. *Brahmacharya* (Student) is a phase where a person left the comforts of one's home to attain education and productive skills. After learning he then found avenues for employment to earn his living before getting into *Grihastha* (Householder, marriage). After marriage, as it is even today, most people are busy with the nitty-gritties of life. First their spouse, then kids, followed by grandkids – the emotional bonding goes on and on. It was also a phase of making efforts, gaining prosperity and fulfilling desires for the self as well as the dependants.

Following *Grihastha*, was the period of *Vanasprastha*, or period of retirement. It was a period of reflection, introspection, company of sages and books was sought, all with the goal of developing *Vairaagya* (detachment/ non attachment). This in turn lead to *Sanyaas* (living like a hermit).

Vairaagya here implies developing the understanding one is on earth for a certain time to carry out certain duties, *Atman* is constant while the body is temporary. It does not imply life is meaningless or that one is without compassion, instead it implores an unconditional acceptance of circumstances and people.

Each ashram carried in it, certain duties or responsibilities that one was to carry out. During *Brahmacharya*, one engaged in learning and the system supported all forms of learning. The student and teachers were both taken care. During *Grihastha*, one carried out the responsibilities towards home, kin, employee (or as employer), society and country justly and wisely. While in *Vanasprastha*, advice was given when sought.

The *ashrams* besides teaching *Dharma* were also a means of enlarging consciousness. The Vedas understood that all human beings want to enlarge themselves metaphorically speaking; this is done through being a part of a

group or through acquisition of material items or both. As a student one's identity expanded to include skill sets, by the time one was a householder his identity expanded to include family and society. At the *Vanasprastha* stage, one had experienced the joys of acquisition and family, and is then in a position to reflect on the larger consciousness and become part of the greater fabric of the universe. Love and concern that was first felt for self, family and society can be extended to the entire universe.

These *ashrams* in essence sustained a person, since no man is an island, and requires different inputs from society at different points in time. The person by carrying out his *Dharma*, in turn sustained society.

Society was also divided along the lines of occupation. While Hinduism today suffers because of caste, the original idea of caste was based on occupation that one engaged in. This engagement in occupation became hereditary, society unfortunately suffered on account of this. Yet, the division on the basis of occupation is found in every society even today. The sections were the *Brahmins* (gurus, intellectuals, advisers, judges, counsellors to kings), *Kshatriyas* (warriors, soldiers, ruling class), *Vaishyas* (merchants, traders, businessmen) and the *Shudras* (salaried, labour class). Each section sustained society, and a member of each of these had his obligations towards his profession.

The discussion of *Dharma* requires this understanding of society, since a person normally plays multiple roles in society. Especially during the *Grihastha* phase, a person is employed in a profession and has obligations towards self, family and kin. There can be a conflict of interest, what do the Vedic teachings have to offer in this regard. The corrupt businessman can argue that money is needed for sustaining the family, especially when talent and hard work is not aptly rewarded. Another issue that can arise is the

rigidity of the system, must a person continue to stay in relationship that is demeaning, just because vows have been taken.

To both of these issues, there are answers. The corrupt businessman while justifying his argument forgets that he too is part of the system, when the systems fail, they fail for all. While he may place self interest ahead today, the society will be at stake tomorrow; the children for whom he does his actions might be in jeopardy in the future.

But does that imply one takes no action, is *Dharma* a self negating concept, built only upon responsibility towards others. No *Dharma* implores responsibility but not as a duty that destroys the conscience of the person, anything that places an individual's self respect (not ego) at risk is against *Dharma*. What is against *Dharma* is to be questioned and fought against. There is above all, one's *Dharma* towards his own self; the body and mind are to be protected. The body and mind form the basis for all action and prosperity; hence they should be taken care of. *Dharma* in its most pure sense is to do all actions from love and consciousness. Leading a *Dharmic* life is then not a reflex action, but a question of consideration and thought. From this consideration, action is then taken. Action here refers to *Karma*.

Karma is then a means by which a conscious being acts out its *Dharma*.

5

KARMA

What's Karma? How is it responsible for our pains and gains? How to overcome it?

*

Misunderstood as destiny, *Karma* is much more than that. For every negative incident in life, we often try to place the blame on someone or something else. We try to wash our hands by blaming our opponents, destiny, stars and even gods, and deities. So, what is (or who is) responsible for all that is happening in our life? This is an important question that gets a complex answer. Here's a Vedic perspective.

There once was a wise lady named *Gautami*, blessed with peace and tranquillity of mind. One fateful day she found her son dead in consequence of having been bitten by a serpent. An angry fowler, by name *Arjunaka*, found the serpent and bound it with a string and brought it before *Gautami* and asked "This infamous destroyer of a child does not deserve to live longer. Shall I throw it into the fire or shall I hack it into pieces?"

To this *Gautami* replied "*Arjunaka*, release this serpent as it does not deserve death at your hands. By killing this serpent, my boy will not be restored to life, and by letting it live, no harm will be caused to you."

But the fowler, unconvinced, retorted "These words which you have spoken don't behove a person who is plunged in sorrow. Those who value peace of mind assign everything to the course of Time as the cause, but practical

men take to revenge. Therefore, relieve your grief and order me to kill this serpent.”

Gautami replied “People like us are never afflicted by fear. Good men have their conscience always intent on virtue. The death of my son was predestined: therefore, I don’t approve killing this serpent. The wise do not harbour resentment because resentment leads to all kinds of pain. I earnestly request that you forgive and release this serpent on grounds of compassion.”

Arjunaka, still unconvinced, said “Why do you say so? Let us earn great and inexhaustible merit hereafter by killing this evil creature. Merit is acquired by killing an enemy: by killing this despicable creature, you shall acquire great and true merit hereafter.”

Gautami disagreed “What good is there in tormenting and killing this serpent and what good is won by not releasing this serpent – it is his tendency to keep biting everyone? Therefore, *Arjunaka*, why should we not forgive this serpent and try to earn merit by releasing it?”

The wise *Gautami*, although repeatedly persuaded by the fowler to let him kill the serpent did not change her mind. The serpent, in severe pain, then uttered spoke in a human voice. “O *Arjunaka*, what fault is there of mine? I have no will of my own, and am not independent. *Mrityu* (Death) sent me on this errand. By his direction, I have bitten this child, and not out of any anger or choice on my part. Therefore, if there be any sin in this, O fowler, then it is of *Mrityu*.”

The fowler, untouched by the serpent’s argument, replied “If you have done this evil, led thereto another, the sin is yours also as you are an instrument in this act. As in the making of an earthen vessel the potter’s wheel and rod and other things are all regarded as causes, so are you. He who is guilty

deserves death at my hands. You are guilty. Indeed, you confessed yourself this in this matter!”

Even after presenting several arguments serpent failed to impress the fowler. Fowler could seldom accept that *Mrityu* was the cause of death and not the serpent.

Eventually, the *Mrityu* (Death) himself appeared on the scene and said “Guided by *Kaala* (Time), I, O serpent, sent you on this errand, and neither you nor I is the reason for this child’s death. All creatures, mobile and immobile, in heaven, or earth, are influenced by *Kaala*. The whole universe, O serpent, is imbued with this same influence of *Kaala*. Knowing this O serpent, do you still consider me to be guilty? If any fault attaches to me in this, you also would be to blame.”

The serpent responded thus “I do not, O *Mrityu*, blame you, nor do I absolve you of all blame. I only suggested that I am directed and influenced in my actions by you. If any blame attaches to *Kaala*, or, if it is not desirable to attach any blame to him, it is not for me to scan the fault. We have no right to do so. As it is incumbent on me to absolve myself from this blame, so it is my duty to see that no blame attaches to *Mrityu*.”

Then the serpent, addressing *Arjunaka*, said “You have listened to what *Mrityu* has said. Therefore, it is not proper for you to torment me, I am guiltless, by tying me with this chord.”

The fowler said “I have listened to you, O serpent, as well as to the words of *Mrityu*, but these, O serpent, do not absolve you from all blame. *Mrityu* and you are the causes of this child’s death. Accursed be the wicked and vengeful *Mrityu* who causes affliction to the good.”

Mrityu argued “As already said, we both are not free agents, but are dependents on *Kaala* (Time), and ordained to do our appointed work. You should not find fault with us if you do consider this matter thoroughly.”

Fowler was still unconvinced. And then *Kaala* (Time) arrived at the scene of disputation on this point of morality and spoke thus to the serpent and *Mrityu* “Neither *Mrityu*, nor this serpent, nor I, O fowler, are guilty of the death of any creature. We are merely the immediate causes of the event. O *Arjunaka*, the *Karma* of this child formed the cause of our action in this matter. There was no other cause by which this child came by its death. It was killed because of his own *Prarabdha* (past *Karma*). His *Karma* has been the cause of its destruction. We are all subject to the influence of our respective *Karma*. *Karma* is an aid to salvation even as sons are, and *Karma* also is an indicator of virtue and vice in man. We urge one another even as acts urge one another. As men make from a lump of clay whatever they wish to make, even so, do men attain to various results determined by their own *Karma*. As light and shadow are related to each other, so are men related to *Karma* through their own actions. Therefore, neither are you, nor am I, nor *Mrityu*, nor the serpent, nor this *Gautami* is the cause of this child’s death.”

Gautami who was quiet witness to the conversation intervened and said to *Arjunaka* in a consoling tone “Neither *Kaala*, nor *Mrityu*, nor the serpent, is the cause in this matter. My son has met with death as the result of his own *Karma*. I too so acted in the past that my son has died as its consequence. Let now *Kaala* and *Mrityu* retire from this place, and you too do the same after releasing the serpent.”

Interestingly, the essence of this story is the essence of all Vedic scriptures, including *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Aranyakas*, *Shatakas* and *Gitas*. Yet many

adherents of Hindu religion waste much time blaming destiny, stars and even gods for their pains and gains. We are ourselves responsible. At the same time, the scriptures do not say precautionary actions should not be taken or that we should accept our fate as is. The scriptures advice that we take responsibility for what fate might deal us and then take necessary action after thinking about all consequences.

It is to be noted that *Karma* is not simply outward action; thought, inner speech also constitute *Karma*. This is because recurrent thoughts give way to habit patterns, which become outward actions. And the best of intentions do not absolve us of the consequences of ill thought of actions.

Karma is not a fatalistic mechanism, instead it a clear and unbiased method that demands awareness on the part of the individual. Reincarnation is not continual turns on the merry go round till one finally gains eternal bliss, instead the knowledge of reincarnation and *Karma* implores people to take action today. Now. In this moment. To seek eternal bliss in this life.

For each action carries its consequence, if we require a good consequence it behoves us to consider consequences of actions before acting. A person might then retort that resorting to the life of a hermit is the best action and it carries little responsibility. This is not so, acts such as sleeping, doing nothing, thinking or laying, are acts nevertheless, even though it looks like nothing is being done, there is still a result to such acts. Even in inaction there is action. Since, every action will have an impact, and then it is in our favour to take noble actions that serve a good purpose. It is because of that, it has been advised to work in accordance with our *Dharma*, with complete consciousness, devoid of reflexive mental conditioning, to do actions that sustain us.

In *Bhagavad-Gita*, *Krishna* very clearly states that fate or destiny of individuals is determined as per their own *Karma* in the past. *Destiny* or fate is therefore called *Prarabdha Karma* (accumulated *Karma*). If you've done something good; a good is surely on the way back to you; and vice versa. Since we aren't sure of our deeds in our past as well as past lives – it's best to perform *Nishkaama Karma* or acts without attachments and find pleasure in doing our work – work for work's sake that is to become a *Yogi*, and the process of becoming one is *Yoga*. Therefore, be assured for all that is good, middling or bad, you've but yourself to blame – stop seeking solutions in Temples, charts or Soothsayers. These – like opium – can only offer you temporary relief. The eternal relief is in finding peace after doing your work bereft of lust, anger, greed, infatuation, ego and envy.

What are the ways by which one can develop better judgement and thinking, so that *Karma* carried out is for noble causes? The answer to that is *Yoga*.

6

YOGA

What is true meaning of Yoga? Is Yoga all about exercises and meditation? What is the true benefit of following Yoga? How different is a Yogi compared to average individuals? What are the benefits of following the principles of Yoga in everyday life?

*

Yoga is known to many as an exercise, posture, and meditation. This kind of *Yoga* is called *Astanga Yoga* which happens to be a small part of larger *Yogic* Knowledge practiced and professed by *Yogic* seers. The *Sanskrit* word *Yoga* comes from the root word *Yuj* which means to link or connect, it can also mean *Path*. One of revered Vedic scripture – *Bhagavad Gita* – offers significant insight into this subject. Each of *Bhagavad Gita*'s 18 Chapters teaches 18 different kinds of *Yoga*, each of which could be interpreted in a way as to find balance, happiness, success as well as opulence in our personal as well as professional life. Here's a perspective on this timeless wisdom for day to day application:

1. **VISHADA YOGA** – *Path of dejection.*

Problems are natural in life. But when they arise it's important to find some solid solutions. In the first chapter of *Bhagavad Gita*, *Arjuna* is depressed and wants to give up the fight for he thinks it

makes no sense. *Arjuna* in many ways is feeling what most of the people feel at work – frustration, irritation as well as anxiety. When under the influence of these conditions people often consider giving up, rather than standing their ground and doing whatever the best they can. The problem in such a situation is not as much as the situation but the state of mind – dejection. When such feelings are uprooted without a trace we all know how insurmountable we can be. Overcoming such path of dejection – *Vishada* – and having a constant steady and unfettered mind is among the most important objectives of *Yoga*. Most people with trivial problems are at this stage of *Yoga*.

2. **SAMKYA YOGA** – *Path of Analysis*.

Everyone understands the significance of analysis. There are also extremists who believe in *analysis until paralysis*. It's important to shun extremes in life. Extremes – good or bad – are counterproductive. In analysis, it's important to be objective rather than subjective. To be able to see the greater good in even difficult situation one needs to have a mind that's undisturbed. When the mind is bereft of negative feelings and impressions we can be better analysts. *Samkhya Yoga* is an analytical path to find a way out of the path of *Vishada*.

3. **KARMA YOGA** – *Path of Action*.

It teaches all about action and reaction – Law of Causation or *Karma* with greater depth. Its emphasis is on teaching how excessive indulgence in sense gratification can lead to bondage and eventually to the destruction of all that is good. It also

suggests why activity should be performed with detachment. One of the greatest challenges in today's commercial world is unhealthy competition. This sense of extreme competition comes from a sense of insecurity – which too can be translated as *Vishada*. Fear is a very negative component. It hurts greater than it can ever help. Thus, we see there are so many stress related diseases, including Hypertension, Diabetes, and Debility, faced by business leaders as well as managers. *Karma Yoga* also explains the greater wisdom of nature; how everything happens due to a cause. Even science can testify to the fact that nothing happens without a cause and causes lead to effect and the process goes on. *Karma* is how the universe works. Understanding *Karma Yoga* is a quintessential to finding peace at work, even in a competitive environment, while staying away from anxiety and fear.

4. **GYANA YOGA** – *Path of Knowledge*.

Vedic scriptures lay significant emphasis on understanding and knowing who we really are – it explains how we are not the body. This knowledge is important because we often think too much in the materialistic sense making us grow more ignorant as well as greedy. The ignorant, as per *Bhagavad Gita*, is also greedy. This is because greed yields negative *Karma*, that which ensures negative effect. If you know that only good yields good and bad – bad, you have understood the true knowledge about the working of the materialistic world. So, if you knew that something is bad would you pursue it? Therefore, the person who is corrupt,

greedy, jealous, pompous, egoistic etc. is really the ignorant person who often suffers in life owing to the ignorance of truth. *Gyana Yoga* enlists various truths that are important in achieving that which is best for one and all and helps us to lead an efficient, effective as well as a prosperous professional and personal life.

5. **KARMA VAIRAGYA YOGA** – *Renunciation of fruits of action or working without expectations.*

It is also known as *Karma Sanyasa Yoga* – it explains actions and inactions, and the true meaning of renunciation. Since for every action, there is a reaction – cause and effect – some may think of inaction as a solution. *Bhagavad Gita* explains with exceptional brilliance how inaction is also an action. It explains why people must work in some way or the other even to sustain their bodies. It explains how even eating, drinking, sleeping is an action as well! You've, therefore, no escape from your *Karma* – if you are wasting your time, you've to bear the consequences arising thereof. The best *Karma*, however, is that where you work without the fear of failure or excitement of success. Maintaining a perfect mental equilibrium is a precursor to being called a *Yogi*.

6. **ABHYASA YOGA** – *Path of the practice of self-control.*

This is also known as *Astanga Yoga* – the yoga as we know it today. When you begin a profession it is natural for you to have some impediments on working efficiently. Greater efficiency can never be reached unless you've persistently worked with dedication and love the very work you do. *Astanga Yoga* as the *Yoga* is known today enables you to prepare your mind and body

for the challenges of daily life. It enables you to build a strong body as well as a peaceful mind – both of which are important for being able to work persistently. Persistence is the key to achievement. When you are working without hurting the fine balance of nature – without any traces of fear of failure or concerns about success – you’ve truly conquered yourself and are a *Yogi*.

7. PARAMAHAMSA VIGYANA YOGA – *Path of wisdom.*

Wisdom cannot be taught or coached. It’s something to be realized. It comes because of a person’s work, experience as well as dedication to common good – *Sadhana*. When you understand the cause of *Vishada* and have conquered your senses with relentless *Sadhana* you attain a stage called *Paramahamsa Vigyana*. Through this stage, you are better prepared to lead, guide as well as mentor your colleagues, family, friends, kith and kin. Your life is perpetual bliss once you attain this state of *Paramahamsa*.

8. AKSHARA PARABRAHMA YOGA – *Path of understanding the nature of physical entities, material activities and ever-changing material manifestation.*

Vedic sages believed that it’s not possible to understand the world unless we understand our deep and true inner self – This understanding of *Atman* is an important precursor in finding the connection – *Yuj* – with every being in the universe. We understand people in greater detail when we truly learn and

understand knowledge of *Atman – Atma Bodha*. Through this understanding, we can better ourselves, those around us – in family and organizations. This realization of the connection between one and all of all living creature leads to true compassion – which results not just in good thoughts and action but also true prosperity for all.

9. RAJAVIDYA GUHYA YOGA – *Connecting with the supreme consciousness.*

Knowing consciousness is not the same as realizing it. The intent of Vedic knowledge is to not just to teach but also to motivate people to follow the teachings. If that which is good is practiced – a greater good which will benefit many can also be achieved. This understanding and adherence to the greater good is what could be understood as *Rajavidya Guhya Yoga*.

10. VIBHUTI VISTARA YOGA – *Path of manifestation of opulence.*

Vibhuti is often translated as ‘Holy ash’. *Vibhuti* also means Opulence – great wealth and luxury. One of the greatest mistakes people do is to confuse money with wealth. Money is a tool to achieve wealth. Wealth is that which makes us happy. Happiness is that which is attained without *Kama* (Lust), *Krodha* (Anger), *Moha* (Infatuation), *Mada* (Ego) and *Matsarya* (Jealousy) – also known as *Arishadvargas*. When you attain anything without these six impediments or blemishes your life is enriched. This enrichment is verily the *Vibhuti* – Opulence. Understanding and realizing this opulence is, therefore, important.

11. VISHWARUPA DARSHANA YOGA – *Path to the vision of universal form.*

Says Bhartrihari in Vairagya Shakti “For a foot that has a footwear, it’s as if the entire world is covered with carpet. For those with fears and sadness – the entire world is filled with fear and sadness.” The mind can be delusional when we don’t find balance. These delusions are a result of ignorance (about *Atman*) and excessive attachment. As *Krishna* rightly points out “From delusion comes anger, through anger sense of good judgment is lost, through loss of good judgment wrong decisions are made and through wrong decisions comes disaster.” In *Vishwarupa Darshana Yoga* a student is sought to see his *Atman* in others and other’s *Atman* in him. It is a way to attain connectivity with not just our own kind; but that of other species as well. It won’t be wrong to say that for some it could be a lifelong process. But unless we are able to see the universal connect in every being we are far from understanding the fundamentals of *Yoga*.

12. BHAKTI YOGA – *Path of devotion or love.*

There are various ways to achieve what we desire. Path of love or devotion – *Bhakti* – to the object of desire is verily an important one. If we do, that which we do, with a sense of love – *Bhakti Bhava* – we are doing a positive *Karma*. Through this *Bhakti Bhava*, we also ensure destruction of hate – which is important in establishing all that is good. Though *Vigyana* – or Wisdom – we realize that hate cannot kill hate. Hate can only beget hate. By shunning hate totally we first arrive at a state of indifference

eventually leading to love and compassion. While we may seldom approve of the negative qualities in people – we are sure not to hate them when we realize the concept of *Bhakti Bhava*. This is because we know what's in us is also in them – *Atman* – and that which they are doing is because of their ignorance. With this knowledge, we are better equipped to resolve our home and work conflicts, thus leading to a productive and enriching environment.

13. **KSHETRA KSHETRAJNA VIBHAGA YOGA** – *Path of nature.*

Better known as *Prakriti-Purusha Viveka Yoga* – path of nature – it affirms that we are not this body, we are *Atman* – that very conscious energy that, like any other energy, is neither created nor destroyed. So, when we realize that we are *Atman* we verily know that we are neither born nor dead – let alone suffer. When the suffering is only for the body – we ourselves are bereft of all fears. Through this absence of fear and other negative tendencies, we realize our full potential. We can think objectively, have compassion, be bereft of hate and can make a positive contribution to the world we live in. When we know that we are not the body – stress levels can come down and the body benefits from it because a lot many ailments resulting from stress are annulled. Greater efficiency, greater competence as well as success can be attained even while remaining detached from the results.

14. **GUNATRAYA VIBHAGA YOGA** – *Path of the three divisions of modes – Sattva, Rajas and Tamas.*

Vedic teachings suggest that there are only three ways to divide things – for the sake of greater understanding of the material world. These are *Sattva* (Good), *Rajas* (Middling) and *Tamas* (Bad).

Sattva is the quality of intelligence, virtue, and goodness and creates harmony, balance, and stability. It is light (not heavy) and luminous in nature. *Sattva* provides happiness and contentment of a lasting nature. It is the principle of clarity, wideness, and peace, the force of love that unites all things together.

Rajas is the quality of change, activity, and turbulence. It introduces a disequilibrium that upsets an existing balance. *Rajas* is motivated in its action, ever seeking a goal or an end that gives it power. It possesses outward motion and causes a self-seeking action that leads to fragmentation and disintegration. While in the short-term *Rajas* is stimulating, and provides pleasure, owing to its unbalanced nature it quickly results in pain and suffering. It is the force of passion that causes distress and conflict.

Tamas is the quality of dullness, darkness, and inertia and is heavy, veiling or obstructing in its action. It functions as the force of gravity that retards things and holds them in specifically limited forms. It possesses a downward motion that causes decay and disintegration. *Tamas* brings about ignorance and delusion in the mind and promotes insensitivity, sleep, and loss of awareness. It is the principle of materiality or unconsciousness that causes consciousness to become veiled.

Understanding the greater wisdom about these three qualities is important in having the greater understanding of the material aspects of life.

15. PURUSHOTTAMA YOGA – *Path of supreme enjoyment.*

When we know that we are not the body but *Atman*, we can bring lesser stress in our lives; through this lesser stress we can understand people and circumstances objectively, through this objectivity we know what's good and bad, and through this understanding we pursue that which is truly good. By this good actions or *Karma*, we beget that which is good. Through goodness comes bliss that which is perpetual in nature and, eventually, we ourselves personify good – we become *Purushottama* (utmost among men).

16. DAIVASURA SAMPAD VIBHAGA YOGA – *The path of Divine and Demonic qualities.*

There are qualities that determine if we are good or bad. Good qualities are that which put us on the path of betterment of our self, work and objective. Bad qualities are that which divert us from the path of understanding our self, work, and objectives besides causing troubles to those around us. But when we choose a path that is good, it's certainly not easy. Since, most often deter from a difficult path, *Bhagavad Gita* offers us solutions to overcome such impediments when they arise.

As per Vedic scriptures, there are twelve predictable impediments on the path of *Yoga*, along with several

consequences that grow out of them. While these impediments are natural – overcoming, them is said to be of “utmost” importance. These impediments are:

1. *Vyadhi* – Disease, illness, sickness
2. *Styana* – Mental laziness, inefficiency, idleness, procrastination, dullness
3. *Samasya* – Indecision, Doubt
4. *Pramada* – Carelessness, negligence
5. *Alasya* – Sloth, languor, laziness
6. *Avirati* – Sensuality, want of non-attachment, non-abstention, craving
7. *Bhranti Darshana* – False view of perception, confusion of philosophies
8. *Alabdha Bhumikatva* – Failing to attain stages of practice
9. *Anavasthitatva* – Instability, slipping down, inability to maintain balance
10. *Chitta Vikshepa* – Distraction of mind
11. *Te* – Blaming on others and things outside for failure
12. *Antarayah* – Obstacles, impediments

However, there is a single underlying principle that is the antidote of these obstacles and their consequences, and that is one-pointedness of mind – *Ekagra Chitta*. Although there are many ways in which this one-pointedness of mind can be achieved the principle is uniform. If the mind is focused, then it is far less likely to get entangled and lost in the mire of delusion that

can come from these obstacles. The key to overcoming obstacles is not to get distracted. Constant recollection of *Yogic* knowledge is the key to staying focused on the positive attitudes, actions or situation in life.

17. SHRADDHATRAYA VIBHAGA YOGA – *The path of three divisions of faith.*

This chapter of *Bhagavad Gita* enables us to understand practices which result in actions that personify goodness, passion, and ignorance. It's a significant chapter on understanding and choosing an efficient lifestyle for ourselves. It helps people in ensuring *Sattva* through diets, habits, and thoughts. Vegetarianism is an important element in nurturing *Sattva*. A healthy lifestyle, too, is important in living a life that's not just blissful but also prosperous.

18. MOKSHA UPADESHA YOGA – *Path of renunciation.*

Renunciation is the perfection of *Yoga*. *Yogi* is one who works as per his *Dharma* without being attached to the results. Working on this path of *Dharma* one can be free from the bondage of action and reaction. Renunciation can also be interpreted as retirement. It's important for us to know when to call it a day. Often, in many organizations older people cling to their positions for fear of losing their relevance or power. Instead of helping the organization grow with their experience they turn into impediments themselves. Such people, no matter how smart or resourceful, are obvious impediments to organizations as well as society. They serve neither their own good nor that of their

organization. To retire and offer their advice (only when they are asked for) is important for creating a conducive environment for nurturing future talents – for organizations are designed to outlive individuals, including their founders.

To conclude, it could always help to remember this simplest of a definition of *Yoga*, offered by *Krishna* himself in *Bhagavad Gita*: “When you perform your duties and abandon all attachment to success or failure with an evenness of mind it is verily *Yoga*.”

Now that we have understood the different types of *Yoga*, who or what is a *yogi*? What is the difference between a *yogi* and other people?

YOGI, BHOGI & ROGI

The one who's always happy, the one whose happiness comes from addiction and the one who's ill because of addiction.

*

As per *Yogic* teachings there are essentially three types of people: *Yogi* (One who's involved in persistent effort to better oneself so as to better the world), *Bhogi* (One who's extremely involved in satisfying his/her carnal pleasures or addictions) and *Rogi* (One who has incurred unbearable pain through illness by abusing one's own body and mind).

Among the Himalayan yogis, there is a saying "Three people can seldom sleep at night, they are: *Yogi*, *Bhogi*, and *Rogi*." *Yogi*, because (s)he is persistently engaged in *Yoga Sadhana* (processes taken up with the goal of developing meditation or contemplation), *Bhogi* someone who is addicted to some kind of material pleasure and is ever engaged in pleasing his senses and *Rogi* (once a *Bhogi*) who through his addictions has abused his body and mind so much that they have incurred damages resulting in unbearable pain and is, therefore, unable to sleep.

Unfortunately, these days, there are ignorant individuals who, just by studying *Astanga Yoga* (*Yoga* as most people know it today, physical exercises), call themselves as *Yogi* (male) or *Yogini* (female). But then, what these self-styled "*Yogis*" and "*Yoginis*" don't understand is the true meaning of *Yoga*. *Astanga Yoga* is only a small step in the path of *Yoga*.

Since *Yoga* teaches “Healthy body leads to healthy mind” most yogic teachings are focused on bettering one’s mind through a series of actions (*karma*), including exercises and meditations. But once you have a healthy body and a healthy mind you need to know what to do with it. If you’re making your body and mind healthy only to abuse it – yet again – what is the point? It’d be just like going through a long process of detoxification only to get addicted again once the course is complete. It is pointless, useless and vain!

As one of the revered *Rishi* – *Vashistha* says, “A person who either eats too much or too less, who engages in persistent carnal pleasures and is extreme in his emotional inclinations can seldom be a *Yogi*.”

Extremes in all form are eternally shunned in the Vedic teachings. If you eat too much or too less you are abusing your body; you need to give your body what it needs.

Yogi is a person who is well balanced and is persistently on the path of universal welfare. A *Yogi* is neither egoistic nor inflicted with an inferiority complex; he does not find ultimate pleasure in sex or any addiction. *Yogi* is also not that person who suppresses his sexual or other impulses. Instead has transcended his carnal urges and has found significant pleasure in his *Sadhana*. The objective of life is to become a *Yogi*. One can become a *Yogi*, and continue to lead a normal existence, leaving at home with family and other commitments; there is no need to become a forest dweller. Dwellings do not define a *Yogi*, but rather his mental state does.

Adi Shankaracharya, one of the greatest proponents of Vedic wisdom, puts this in better perspective “When we are a baby we think our life is nothing without our mother. Then we grow up and make friends – finding pleasure in playing with them. At this point, it seems as if life is boring without

friends. Then comes the teenage, we see the pleasure in watching and enjoying the company of the opposite gender. The problem is that many are caught in it. Even as they grow old, instead of finding joy in knowledge and good deeds they find ways to stay young – in vain – to enjoy the carnal pleasure...”

An excessive preoccupation with pleasure is a *Bhoga* (addiction) that results in *Roga* (illness). This is so for any other kind of preoccupation such as with work, family, etc. These preoccupations while filling our time and giving us a sense of importance, become a part of our identity and self worth. In later stages of life when these identities are taken away, it leaves a sense of worthlessness, isolation and loss. Therefore, it is never *Yoga*.

Bhoga (addiction) are of several kinds but their effects are the same – they result in *Roga*. All *Roga* originate from some or the other kind of *Bhoga*. A healthy mind is that which is free of addictions. If you are too emotionally invested in any work, that counts as a *Bhoga*.

A *Yogi* knows this and works towards performing actions that can deliver perpetual bliss. In Yogic scriptures, this process is called *Sadhana*. If a person is beginning on the path of *Yoga* (even if one has mastered *Astanga Yoga*) he’s a *Sadhak* – at best – not ‘*Yogi*’ or ‘*Yogini*’.

Yogi or *Yogini* is one who has truly attained a state of perpetual bliss – and has transcended the very idea of *Bhoga* (addictions). *Yogi* is also someone who is seldom afflicted with *Roga*.

In absence of detachment, *yoga* is seldom possible. True, *Yogi* is persistently engaged in some work. But since a *Yogi* is not emotionally attached to that work or its result, he is not a *Bhogi*. What’s also important to know is that *Yogi* ceases to be a *Yogi* when he’s attached to his *Sadhana* or even develops ego (*Ahankar*) about it. In effect, he takes action because

it is demanded by the situation, for example if a show of anger is required he does so, but it is a show and does not in any way effect his biological or mental balance.

Yoga does not mention a destination per se. It's a relentless path. In *Yoga*, *Sadhana* is a journey. When you understand the moment you are in and enjoy it as it is, then you have started practicing *Yoga*. Rewards of *Sadhana* in *Yoga* are phenomenal. It's instantaneous. It's also perpetual. There's no waiting for joy, only joy all the way.

As said by *Krishna* in *Bhagavad Gita*, *Yoga* is that activity in which “a person performs his activities by staying detached and is equipoise in success as well as failure.” This state of equipoise is the path, as well as, the destination of *Yoga*; A path that liberates you from all illnesses (*Roga*) as well as addictions (*Bhoga*). He is a *Yogi*, who free from mental conditionings and biases has better understanding of solutions, governance, power and wealth. How can one develop the mental state necessary for becoming a *Yogi*?

8

THE POWER OF ISLOATION

*From an emotional state of loneliness,
incompleteness and sadness to a state of solitude,
completeness and happiness.*

*

Man is said to be a social animal, with isolation being as seen as something to be feared. Isolation brings up images of prisoners in solitary confinement, house arrest or even patients who are quarantined, rarely is it associated with the calm of sages or meditators. Company of people is advised and encouraged by society at all levels. Silence is a vacuum needed to be filled and isolation is often loneliness – a feeling of lack, a depression, a need, incompleteness, and an absence. They relate isolation to pitch darkness – a state of disconcertment.

Given this, it is hard to believe for many that isolation can be joyous – an idea of presence, fullness, aliveness, the joy of being, overflowing through the realization of the truth that you are complete in yourself and that nobody is needed to complete you, and that for you – you yourself are enough.

What sets apart the isolation of the meditator from the despair of the prisoner is the characteristic of wisdom. Isolation is seen to be a tool, a method employed by the wise who constantly seek supreme wisdom. Detached from the world and its generally mundane issues, meditators see

social isolation as an opportunity to analyze, think and contemplate better solutions for the greater good.

Often crowds can make people lonely and bereft of an individual sense of identity. Therefore, various Vedic scriptures suggest, one should learn to establish friendship with one's own self through *Ekaanth* (by one's self) before seeking to engage others. This is necessary because if one is comfortable with oneself, any other relationship one gets into will not be to fill a void, but a matter of synergy.

It also suggests that through *Ekaanth* (isolation) an individual can elevate oneself by one's own mind. The mind is then seen to be the friend of the wise, and enemy of unwise. Also, for the one who has conquered his mind, their mind is the best of friends; but for one who has failed to do so; his very mind will become his greatest enemy.

The mind is significant. It shapes not just the life of individual but also of the society around him and, at times, even the world. This is truer still for leaders. Leaders who seek to conquer the world without conquering their mind often end up becoming despots and, eventually, cause their and their societies' destruction. History testifies to that fact.

Bhagavad-Gita (verses 62-63) puts it in a much better perspective: An individual with an untamed mind while seeking his object of desire develops an attachment to the sense object. From this attachment greed is born; from greed comes anger. From anger comes delusion - from delusion comes bewilderment of memory. Bewilderment of memory affects decision making and through unwise decision destruction is guaranteed. Therefore, one who has controlled his senses and mind, being free of attachments, desire and aversion attains wisdom and consequently a state of perpetual bliss.

The question then arises, what is befriending or taming the mind and how can it be done?

Befriending the mind in the most simplest of terms is identifying and acknowledging one's own limitations in thinking. We have already identified that most actions are taken from the basis of the *Arishadvarga*. What is interesting is that the thought patterns that determine the *Arishadvarga* are rarely our own. Typically, the thinking mind is conditioned by genes, habits and social conditioning. If we observe our thought patterns closely enough we find tinges of our parents, family, society and past experiences. Rarely is our action unique or original.

Naveenam Naveenam Kshane Khsane, translated to be new in every moment or every moment is new, propounds that just as each instance in life is unique the action demanded in that moment must be original as well, not reflexive habit or preconceived ideas parading as solutions.

Yet appreciating the uniqueness of every moment is possible only when we have delved deep into our psyche, identified our core beliefs and evaluated them against their usefulness for the situation presented to us. Unless this happens, we are creatures of habit destined to repeat history.

Taking some time out daily to meditate and contemplate (possible only by *Ekaanth*) on our actions is then a means of understanding our mental conditioning.

Ekaanth – or isolation – is then a power tool which enables us to delve into and see how to steady our mind. A mind is not steady if it is agitated when it feels lonely and longs for company. Extreme desire for social acceptance is among the various social problems of our society. People, who are perturbed when they don't get adequate appreciation from people or publicity, are the ones with an unsteady mind. For this unsteady mind,

the only way to live is to seek a way to find social acceptance – appreciation from their loved ones, citations from their superiors, testimonies from their peers, publicity in the media and awards from the organizations. It doesn't take a genius to recognize that these people are often troubled, souls. And when they assume the position of power the situation can be even more troubling.

By being within ourselves in isolation, through contemplation and meditation we find that which is quintessential for our progress – peace. If you've trouble with isolation, it's obvious that you have a trouble with yourself. Somewhere, deep within you're not at peace and, worse, maybe even at war with yourself.

Therefore, if you seek to work to make the world a better place; you have to be peaceful within. It's only with the light from our inner self that we can enlighten the world.

Having dealt with the nature of consciousness, importance of taking conscious action, who a *Yogi* is and methods that can be employed in becoming one, we now focus on the perspective that Vedic wisdom (and *Yogis* of yore) have on various topics.

The following chapters offer a different perspective on problem solving, education, governance, power and wealth. These perspectives are not the understating of a single person, but teachings that were improved upon by successive generations of people (*Yogis*), who had overcome their limitations before embarking on changing the world.

9

PROBLEM SOLVING

There are two ways to handle a problem, you either solve it or ignore it. Ignoring problems can lead to chaos. Vedic wisdom offers simple yet effective perspective in overcoming personal problems of any nature or size.

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Problems are an inherent part of life. However, if they are not dealt with effort and attention, they have the potential to become a crisis. Here is a six-step Vedic approach to resolving your personal problems – be that with your finances, relationships, career or any other issue.

1. SEEK SOLACE

More than often people seek the company of friends and acquaintances with the hope of finding a solution to their problem. This is not a wise thing to do. You must know that the only person who can ever help you out of your situation is you – yourself. The best that another person can do is offer assistance to you. While, initially it is beneficial to vent, cry and seek possible perspectives with others, eventually one needs to decide on their own what the next course of action will be. All perspectives offered by others are just that, perspectives tainted by their own biases and conditioning. Therefore, try to isolate yourself in a safe and secure

environment, develop a sense of peace and ensure that you don't resort to any form of addiction. These substances while providing momentary relief tend to aggravate the problem at hand. Be assured that unless you don't face the problems yourself – no viable solution is ever available. The best way to face the crisis is being in the company of the self.

2. CALM DOWN

Whenever you are in crisis it's natural for you to lose your mind and experience anxiety/panic attacks. This adds to the problem since such states of panic, anxiety or fear – one often tends to take extreme decisions that often prove counterproductive. It's, therefore, important to calm down, before taking any drastic measures. The best way to do it is to sit down in a comfortable position or lie down on the bed and, then, focus completely on your breathing. Try to regulate your breath; let your inhalation and exhalation be deep and steady. As you steadily focus on your breathing you'll eventually see a drastic drop in anxiety and stress levels. Once you have calmed your mind try to relax further with good thoughts or even music. Remind yourself that neither hope nor fear is real. They are both figments of your imagination. But, while fear can bring the worst in you; hope is sure to bring out best. While fear tends to magnify every negative outcome, hope tends to give the possibility of strength. No fear is worthy of harnessing – just like every hope deserves persistent and careful nurture. Try to indulge in some positive distraction. It could be a good book, movie, music or even spending time with your pet. Make sure these distractions aren't negative in any sense, the book should be inspiring, the movie should be calming – not fear or emotions driven, music should be something that makes you feel better and the pet should be one which loves cuddling and playing. This will give you a breather from your trouble and reset your thought process in the right direction.

3. FIND THE ROOT CAUSE OF YOUR PROBLEM

Once your mind is calm, go back in time and try to find the root of the problem. Remember: There's no effect (problem) without cause; no cause without effect. Revisit the circumstances, the people as well as the situation that led you to your prevailing problem. Ensure that you look at it objectively. Don't be critical of anyone – yourself included. Just look at it in a way as you would watch a movie – detached of emotions. Emotions (both positive and negative) are natural – yes – but they are often counterproductive during problem solving. Don't even hate or curse anyone for any reason, as this will bring out anger and will cloud your thinking. Try to understand why someone did what they did. And enlist the possible reasons for the problem at hand. Once this is done rework on it until you are convinced you have analysed the root cause.

4. TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

For whatever has happened – always remember – you, yourself, are responsible. Don't deflect responsibility on someone else – your stars, god(s), enemies or anyone else. Even if they played a role – it was you who brought it upon you through your actions. There is nothing to be gained by blaming someone else. The solution to any problem can be possible only when we take responsibility for it. Admit your mistakes, limitations as well as the lack of knowledge. When you do it – you'll be on the sure path to find solid, wise as well as lasting solutions to your problems.

5. FIGURE OUT SOLUTIONS

You might be surprised to see what your mind can achieve when it is calm and has taken responsibility for the situation. It will, in due course of time, present forth to you a series of solutions for you to choose from. But make sure that when you choose a solution it's devoid of all negative emotional

tendencies. Vedic wisdom suggests that: All effort without the basis of lust, anger, infatuation, greed, ego, and jealousy is sure to give the desired results. Make sure the aforesaid six negative tendencies are seldom followed; for they are problems in themselves. You can seldom solve a problem with another problem. Problems are solved through solutions; they're aggravated by working with more problem(s).

6. WORK WITH PERSISTENCE

When you start working on the solutions; your persistence is the key. You may or may not believe in luck. But you've nothing within your purview in the idea of luck. Therefore, seek persistence. If you believe in something and work towards it – relentlessly – you stand a greater chance of attaining your objective – a happy & prosperous life.

THE REAL GURU

Guru is not just any teacher, or a saffron clad individual seeking attention to make some money – directly or indirectly, he’s not the one who yearns for publicity. The idea of Guru is something beyond.

*

The *Sanskrit* word *Guru* is often mistranslated as a ‘teacher’. Teacher in *Sanskrit* is called *Shikshak*. A teacher is someone who informs and educates us, who ensures that we learn to read, write and understand. Yet, a teacher has no obligation for the complete welfare of his student(s); he is focused on his specific subject. A teacher is a professional, who teaches to make his living.

But *Guru* is way beyond an ordinary *Shikshak*. *Guru* is a mentor, who inspires, as well as nurtures. Unlike *Shikshak* (teacher), *Guru* is not a professional who does his work in exchange for monetary or any other material gains. He is, honest, shuns the very idea of having something in return. He does what he does, as his duty, borne out of love and stays away from all the results. *Guru* is a sage, a beacon of inspiration for his disciples, especially when they are struck by crisis.

The *Guru* is also one from whom we learn wisdom. Vedic *rishis* (sages) profess that everything we desire – happiness and knowledge, – is deep

within us. While *Shikshak* puts in efforts in order to make us understand what we want or may not want; *Guru* introduces us to ourselves and instills in us the wisdom to seek, lead and enlighten ourselves.

There are two interesting stories from the Vedic literature that are worthy of recollection in understanding the deeper meaning of the word *Guru*.

It is said that *Adi Shankaracharya* of *Kaaladi*, a pioneer in the field of *Advaita* once came across a *Chandaala* (low caste person who works in a crematorium) while on his way to *Hari Ghat* in *Varanasi* for his bath. *Shankaracharya*, aghast at being in the presence of an untouchable, told the latter to keep away. To *Adi Shankaracharya*'s utter dismay, the *Chandaala* raised some pertinent questions from the same *Advaita* philosophy that *Shankaracharya* practised. The chandaala asked "Whom are you telling to keep away? This body or the *Atman* (consciousness) which resides in this body? Your body and mine are made of the same substance, as pots of varying sizes and colors are made of the same clay. How can such body ask another to stay away? Are they not part of the same?" Legend says that *Chandaala*'s words stunned *Adi Shankaracharya*. He realized that any differentiation between one person and another comes from difference in the size and shape of the body and the state of mind that perceives the difference. The *Atman*, however, is beyond all these things. *Shankaracharya* not just hailed the *Chandaala* for showing him this practical side of *Advaita* philosophy, that he himself had been preaching for long, but also offered his salutations and addressed the chandaala as his *Guru*. *Shankaracharya* was so moved that he composed a poem entitled *Manisha Panchaka*. At the end of this poem *Shankaracharya* declares "One who looks at the creation from a non-dualistic viewpoint is my true teacher, be he a *Brahmin* or a *Chandaala*." Here the great proponent of *Advaita Vedanta* (non-duality) declares that the *Guru* can be of any cast, creed, age,

gender or even species. If anyone helps us in our endeavor to realize our true self and full potential that being is our *Guru*.

Yet another story worthy of recollection in this perspective is that of *Avadhoota Dattatreya*.

It is said that once *King Yadu* saw *Avadhoota Dattatreya* in a forest and asked “Sir, you are revered to be quite capable, energetic and wise. Such as you are, why do you live in the forest, free from all desires? Even though you have neither kith and kin nor even a family, how could you be so blissful and self-contented?”

The *Avadhoota* (word meaning: one who has given up all worldly desires) replied, “My contentment is because of my realization of the self. I have gained the necessary wisdom from the whole creation, through 24 *gurus*. Let me elaborate the same for you:

1. **EARTH:** People plow, dig and tread the earth without any respect; they light a fire on it. Yet, the mother earth does not deviate from its path of sustaining life. On the other hand, it shelters the very creatures which cause it harm and trample it under their feet. This attribute of the earth has made me realize that to be wise one must never deviate from one’s dharma or vow of patience, love and righteousness under any circumstances and one should dedicate his life for the welfare of living. I, therefore, consider the earth as my first guru.
2. **AIR:** I observed that air is pure and odourless. And it blows on both sweet and foul-smelling things without any discrimination or preferences. Though it momentarily seems to take on the smell of its surroundings, in a short while, it reveals its pristine quality. From this I learned that a spiritual aspirant should live in the

world, unaffected by the dualities of life like joy and sorrow and by the objects of the senses. One should keep his feelings and speech unpolluted by vain objects. As I have learned all this by observing it, air is my second guru.

3. **SKY:** The soul is also like the sky, which is omnipresent. I have noticed that sometimes the sky (or space) gets thickly overcast or filled with dust or smoke. At sunrise and during night, it apparently takes on different colours. But in fact, it retains its colourless self, and is never touched or stained by anything. From this, I learned that a true sage should remain ever pure like the sky, or space, untouched or unaffected by anything in the phenomenal universe in time, including his own physical processes. His inner being is totally free from an emotional reaction to things and events even like space. Thus, I accepted the sky or space as my third guru.
4. **FIRE:** My fourth teacher is the element of fire. Sometimes, it manifests itself as blazing flames; sometimes as soldering embers, covered by ash. But it is for everyone, irrespective of their moral worth and it burns down their sins; while it remains the ever pure divinity. So too, a sage of perfect realization should accept everyone, burn their sins and bless the giver. Though the fire has no specific form of its own, when it is associated with fuel that burns, it assumes such apparent forms. So too, the true self, though formless, appears in the form of deities, human beings, animals, and trees when it is associated with the respective physical structures. The source of all forms in the universe, as also their end, remains ever mysterious. All the things are manifest only in the time and space between their origin and their

end. Their source and end are the true self, which is eternal, unchanging, un-manifest and omnipresent. The nature of the element of fire is such. The manifest fire transforms the various things it consumes into the same ash. Similarly, the wisdom of self-realization rejects the manifest forms and properties of things as illusion and realizes their one original essence as itself. Thus, the element of fire is my fourth guru.

5. **SUN:** My fifth guru is the sun. Though the sun we see in our daily life is one, it appears as many when reflected by water in different vessels. Similarly, the one self manifests itself as many selves of living creatures when reflected by their physical structures. As Sun illuminates the many forms in nature to our visions, the sage too, illuminates the true nature of all things to his devotees.
6. **PIGEON:** I have gained wisdom from a pigeon too. Once a pair of pigeons lived together on a tree. They bred their young and were bringing them up with deep affection and love. One day, a hunter caught the young fledglings in a snare. The old hen (female pigeon), which returned from the forest with food for its young ones, saw their plight and, unable to leave them, she leaped in the snare to share their fate. Shortly after, the male pigeon turned up and, unable to bear the separation from its sweetheart, it too jumped in the snare and met its end. Reflecting on this, I realized how, even after being born as an intelligent human being, man is caught in the coils of possessiveness and brings about his own spiritual destruction. The self, which is originally free, when associated with the body sense, get identified with it, and thus get caught in the endless cycle of birth, death, and misery. Thus, the pigeons are my sixth guru.

7. **PYTHON:** The python is a sluggard, unwilling to move out briskly for its prey. It lies in its lurch and devours whatever creature it comes across, be it sufficient to appease its hunger. From this, I learned that the man in search of wisdom should refrain from running after pleasures, and accept whatever he gets spontaneously with contentment. Like the python, he should shake off sleep and wakefulness and abide in a state of incessant meditation on the self. Thus, the python was my seventh teacher of wisdom.
8. **SEA:** Contemplating the marvellous nature of the ocean, I have gained much wisdom. Any number of overflowing rivers may join it, yet the sea maintains its level. Nor does its level fall even by a hair's breadth in summer, when all the rivers dry up. So too, the joys of life do not elate the sage of wisdom, nor do his sorrow depress him. Just as the sea never crosses its threshold on the beach, the wise one never transgresses the highest standards of morality under the pull of passions. Like the sea, he is unconquerable and cannot be troubled by anything. Like the unfathomable ocean, his true nature and the depths of his wisdom cannot be easily comprehended by anyone. The ocean, which has taught me this, is my eighth guru.
9. **MOTH:** I often see that the moth (or, more precisely, grasshopper) is tempted by fire to jump in it and get burnt down. So too, the unthinking man is enticed by the illusionary pleasures of the senses and thus gets caught in the ceaseless cycles of birth and death. On the other hand, the wise one, when he catches even a glimpse of the fire of wisdom, leaves everything aside, leaps in

it and burns down the illusion of being a limited self. Thus, the moth was my ninth guru.

10. **ELEPHANT:** The elephant was my tenth guru. The human beings raise a stuffed cow-elephant in the forest. The wild tusker mistakes it for a mate, approaches it and then is skilfully bound in fetters by the cunning human beings. So too, the unregenerate man is tempted by the opposite sex and gets bound by the fetters of infatuation. The seekers after liberation should learn to be free from lust. The elephant was thus one of my teachers.
11. **ANT:** The ant stores up lots of food materials which it neither eats nor gives away in charity to any other creature. In consequence, other more powerful creatures are tempted to plunder the ants. So too, the man who just stores treasures of merely material things becomes a victim of robbery and murder. But the ant has something positive to teach us too. It is a tireless worker and is never discouraged by any number of obstacles and setbacks in its efforts to gather its treasure. So too, a seeker after wisdom should be tireless in his efforts for self-realisation. This noble truth was taught by the little ant, I regard it as my eleventh guru.
12. **FISH:** The fish greedily swallows the bait and is at once caught by the angle-hook. From this, I realized how many meet their destruction by craving for delicious food. When the palate is conquered, all else is conquered. Besides, there is a positive feature in the fish. It never leaves its home, i.e. water. So too, one should never lose sight of his true self, but should always be aware of the being within. Thus, the fish became my twelfth guru.

13. **PINGALA:** The thirteenth guru that has awakened my spirit is a prostitute named *Pingala*. One day, she eagerly awaited a client in the hope that he would pay her amply. She waited and waited till late in the night. When he did not turn up, she was at last disillusioned and reflected thus: “Alas! How stupid I am! Neglecting the divine spirit within, who is of the nature of bliss eternal, I foolishly waited a debauchee (sensualist) who inspires my lust and greed. Henceforth, I shall expend myself on the Self, unite with it and win eternal joy. Through such repentance, she was blessed. Besides, reflecting on its obvious purport, I also realized that any aspirant should likewise reject immediate smaller pleasures for the greater one. I learned that the temptation of false security is the root of misery; that renunciation of these is the sole means of realizing infinite joy.
14. **ARROW-MAKER:** Once I observed an arrow maker who was totally absorbed in moulding a sharp arrow. He grew so oblivious of all else that he did not even notice a royal pageant that passed by. This sight awakened me to the truth that such single-minded, all absorbing contemplation of the Self spontaneously eliminates all temptation for the trivial interests of the world. It is the sole secret of success in spiritual discipline. Thus, the arrow-maker is my fourteenth guru.
15. **PLAYFUL BOY:** Little boys and girls know neither honour nor dishonour. They do not nurse a grudge or a prejudice against anyone. They do not know what is their own, or what belongs to others. Their happiness springs from their own selves, their innate creativity and they do not need any external objects or conditions

to be happy. I realized that the sage of perfect enlightenment is also such. A playful boy thus happened to be my fifteenth guru.

16. **MOON:** Of all things in nature, the moon is unique. It appears to wax and wane during the bright and dark fortnights. In fact, the lunar globe remains the same. In this, it is like the self of the man. While a man appears to pass through the stages of infancy, boyhood, youth, maturity and old age, his real self remains unchanged. All changes pertain only to body and not to the self. Again, the moon only reflects the light of the sun, but has no such of its own. So too, the soul or mind of a man is only a reflection of the light of awareness of the real self. Having taught this truth, the moon became my sixteenth guru.

17. **HONEYBEE:** Honeybee wanders from flower to flower and, without hurting them in the least, draws honey. So too, a spiritual seeker should study all the holy scriptures but retain in his heart, only that which is essential for his spiritual practice. Such is the teaching I imbibed from my seventeenth guru.

18. **DEER:** It is said that deer are very fond of music and that poachers employ it to lure them before hunting them. From this, I learned that passions and sensual desires will soon bog down a spiritual aspirant who has a weakness for merely secular music, till he ultimately loses whatever spiritual progress he has achieved earlier. The deer taught me this truth is my eighteenth guru.

19. **BIRD OF PREY:** A little bird of prey is my nineteenth guru. One day, I saw one such carrying away a dead rat. Many other birds like crows and eagles attacked it, now kicking on its head and again pecking on its sides in their endeavour to knock off the

prey. The poor bird was thus very much pestered. At last, it wisely let its prey fall and all the other birds rushed after it. Thus, freeing itself from so much trouble, it sighed in relief. From this, I learned that a man who runs after worldly pleasure will soon come into clash with his fellow beings who also run for the same, and must face much strife and antagonism. If he learns to conquer his craving for worldly things, he can spare himself much unhappiness. I realized that this is the only way to the peace of the world.

20. **MAIDEN:** Once I observed a family visit a maiden's house, seeking her hand in marriage for their son. At that time, her mother was away from home. So, the maiden herself had to entertain the guests with refreshments. She at once started pounding the food-grains with a pestle. The bangles on her hand started knocking against each other, producing a sound. She was afraid that the guests might hear the sound and be unhappy for having caused her so much trouble. As a Hindu maiden, she is not expected to remove all the bangles on her hand at any time. So, she kept two on each hand and removed all the rest. Even then, they were knocking against each other and making noise. So, she kept only one bangle on each hand this time and she could finish her task in quiet. Reflecting on this, I realized that when several spiritual practices can be pursued with a single-minded effort. Only in solitude, a spiritual aspirant can carry his task. Knowing the truth, I henceforth resorted to solitude. Thus, a maiden happened to be my twentieth guru.
21. **SERPENT:** I observed that a serpent never builds a dwelling for itself. When white ants have raised an anthill for themselves, the

serpent eventually comes to inhabit it. Similarly, worldly people must endure many hardships in raising houses for themselves, while a recluse monk lives in them; or, he leaves in old dilapidated temples, or underneath shady trees. The serpent sheds, leaving off its old skin. So too at the end of his life, *Yogi* leaves his body deliberately and in full awareness of his own true self and is not frightened by the phenomenon of death. On the other hand, he casts off his old body as happily as he does his worn-out clothes and dons new ones. Thus, my twenty-first guru is me.

22. **SPIDER:** The spider is my twenty-second guru. It weaves its web from the thread in the form of a fluid. After some time, it gathers up the web into itself. The supreme projects the whole creation out of itself and after some time, withdraws it into itself at the time of dissolution. The individual soul too bears the senses and the mind within itself and, at its birth as a human being or any other living creature; it projects them out as the sense organs, organs of action and the whole body. In accordance with its latent tendencies, the creature thus born, gathers up all the means and objects needed for its living. At the end of its life's duration, the soul again withdraws the senses, mind and acquired tendencies at the hour of death. This is what I learned from the spider.

23. **CATERPILLAR:** The caterpillar is also one of my teachers of wisdom. The wasp carries its caterpillar to a safe corner and closes it up in its nest and goes on buzzing about it. The young caterpillar is so frightened by the incessant buzzing, that it cannot think of anything else than the buzzing wasp. Through such intermittent contemplation of its mother, the caterpillar too soon grows up into a wasp! In a like fashion, a true disciple is so

charmed and over-awed by the spiritual eminence of his own guru that he cannot think of anyone other than him. Through such contemplation, he soon blossoms into a great spiritual master himself. The caterpillar is thus my twenty-third guru.

24. **WATER:** Water is my twenty-fourth Guru. It quenches the thirst of every creature, sustains innumerable trees and all creatures. While it thus serves all living beings, it is never proud of itself. On the other hand, it humbly seeks the lowliest of places. The sage too should likewise bestow health, peace, and joy to every creature that resorts to him. Yet he should ever live as the humblest of nature's creation.

With such humility and devotion, I looked upon the whole of creation as my teacher, gathered up wisdom and through patient effort I realized my goal of attaining bliss through wisdom.”

Here it is to be understood the stories are allegories and can be applied to any aspirant wanting to achieve a goal, their understanding rests on the perspective of reader.

Finally, it's important to note here that the *Guru* comprises of two words, namely *Gu* (Ignorance) and *Ru* (Destroyer). Therefore, *Guru* is anyone who can destroy our internal and external ignorance. Ignorance is not bliss. It's often the root cause of man's own suffering. When ignorance is identified – solutions present forth and peace is attained.

11

THE RAJAGURUS

The gurus who humbled the mightiest of men and mentored them on the path of wisdom.

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When Alexander ‘The Great’ was in *Aryavart* (as India was known), he had just defeated *Puru* (also known as Porus), the ruler of a small kingdom on the subcontinent’s north-western border in the Punjab. During his march through this conquered kingdom, he saw ascetics clad in nothing but simple loin clothes. They had nothing to call their own, yet weren’t looking hapless. On the contrary, they appeared blissful and content. To the King of Macedonia, who wanted to rule the world to satisfy his appetite for power, this was rather bizarre! ‘How can these paupers be happy without owning anything or commanding anyone’ he must have thought, before summoning a group of ascetics to his tent.

Alexander asked them, through his interpreters, why they lived so despicably and yet felt so happy and content. One of the ascetics, who was a Vedic sage named *Dandamis*, is believed to have replied, “O King, every man can possess only so much of the earth’s surface as he can stand upon. You are a mere human like rest of us, except you are always busy and up to mischief, travelling many leagues from your home, becoming a great nuisance to yourself and to others, taking an army along with you. Ah well! You will soon be dead, and then you will own just as much of this earth as

will suffice to bury you. The reason we are supremely happy is because we know this fact whereas you, by the delusion of false pride and power, have thought of happiness to be outside yourself.”

What *Dandamis* said, as per Greek historians of the time, humbled the great world conqueror. He introspected profoundly. How much he brooded none can tell, but that the “powerful King of Macedonia” never killed the sage ascetic is a fact. Why was this so? It, perhaps, can be that no one had spoken such words to the man who went on to conquer the entire known world during his time, for anyone who spoke without his behest was laid to rest for eternity.

Rajaguru Rishi Vashistha, in his wisdom to *Ram*, declared, “I have no love or hate. My mind does not entertain craving, but is peaceful and balanced. I behold the one common substratum in all things (a piece of wood, a beautiful woman, a mountain, a blade of grass, ice, fire and space) and I am not worried by thoughts like ‘what shall I do now?’ or ‘what I shall get tomorrow?’ I am not bothered by thoughts of old age or death, or by longing for happiness, nor do I regard some as mine and others as not mine... I am disturbed neither by prosperity nor by adversity when they are granted to me, as I regard them with equal vision (even as I look upon my arms as arms). Whatever I do is untainted by desire or the mud of ego-sense; thus, I do not lose my head when I am powerful or go begging when I am poor; I do not let hopes and expectations touch me and even when a thing is old and worn out, I look upon it with fresh eyes as if it were new. I rejoice with the happy ones and share the grief of the grief-stricken, for I am the friend of all, knowing I belong to none and none belongs to me...”

Vedic kingdoms from the times of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* until the *Mauryas* are replete with stories and legends of such ascetics with

‘mystical’ powers to humble even the mightiest of kings. Often, these kings were trained by ascetics in their *ashrams* (hermitages). *Ashrams*, also known as *gurukuls*, were where people went to learn supreme wisdom. At *gurukuls*, sons of mighty kings had to shed their royal clothing and live like any other youth of the time. There was no monetary fee or donation to enter the *gurukul*, rather the system of education was state sponsored. Admissions to a *shikshalaya* (school), *vishwavidyalaya* (university) or *gurukul* (guru’s family) was possible only through humility and merit.

The Vedic sages had a different perspective on education. In the Vedic age, education happened to be a three-step process. This consisted of *Shravan* or learning, *Manan* or memorizing without manipulation and *Nidhidhyasan* or continuous assessment of memorized data and information through application, experience and retrospection. Today *mantras* are considered by many to be a word or sound repeated to aid concentration in meditation, as a Vedic hymn or even a statement or a slogan repeated frequently. *Mantras* during the Vedic era were a system by which realized knowledge was turned into a hymn for students to memorize easily. Students would then reflect on the mantras and then develop their understanding. This was across all levels of education. The thinking process was inculcated from the beginning. We must remember that it was a time when printing technology had not even been conceived so books were in scarcity. Hymn (which were essentially poems) were easier to memorize as well as recollect.

Vedic seers believed that unless acquired information wasn’t stored without distortion or personal bias, true understanding or knowledge wasn’t possible. Therefore, students were made to memorize the mantra before they were given their true meaning. This was by far a better way to transfer knowledge from *Shikshak* (teacher), *Acharya* (professor) or *Guru* (Mentor) to *Shishya* (student). The *Guru-Shishya parampara* (tradition), which was

the basis of education, was essentially in place not only because in absence of printing technology books weren't available easily, but also because books on their own cannot explain fine nuances and can be open to misinterpretation without relevant context. So, a *shishya* (student) would have to seek refuge in a *shikshak*, *acharya* or *guru* to learn anything that he may so desire.

The skill of *Vidhidhyasan*, the most crucial element of the education process, was something *Shishyas* practiced even after they became gurus to other shishyas. *Vidhidhyasan*, or continuous contemplation of all attained data and information, was a lifelong process. *Gurus* of the Vedic era were clear, that facts were not eternal truths. Facts change with time and context. What is a fact today may not be a fact tomorrow. Therefore, relevance of facts has to be tested from time to time. If they fail the test shishyas were advised to let go of such data and information. Relevance was critical, as well as supreme. This was also considered as foundation of wisdom. Although *Gurus* were revered everything that was learned from them was eternally put to test and worked upon. The knowledge were improved upon with experience and then passed on to the next generation or if it was considered irrelevant it was simply let go of after serious contemplation. The hallmark of Vedic wisdom was neither blind belief nor blind reverence. The Vedic tradition of education extended to trades like carpentry, smithy, stone carving, and martial arts along with spiritual knowledge. Everything required to sustain society was taught depending on the interest and ability of the student.

Gurudakshina, (tributes to a guru) given to the guru by the student, were often something *shishyas* (students) would get on their own through the application of knowledge they had got from their gurus. *Gurudakshina* was

not mandatory, but was given as a mark of deep reverence to the guru and also to support the tradition of learning. It is to be noted that gurus were not conventional teachers, they required nothing from the students and were capable of taking care of themselves in all regards.

Often, when princes became kings, they continued to seek guidance from these gurus who were addressed by kinsmen as '*Rajaguru*' – guru of the *raja* (king). These *rajagurus* were most often the most influential people. After all, a person who had the complete full attention of kings had every reason to be powerful. Yet, these gurus seldom let themselves become corrupted by power or any of its manifestations, including money. They were far from being corruptible, which is probably why kings cherished their advice.

Bhartrihari, a king who became an ascetic by choice and was a *rajguru*, says in his work *Vairagya Shataka*, "I am not an actor; I am not a courtesan; I am not a singer; I am not a buffoon; I am not a beautiful woman; what I have to do with royal palaces? You are a King; I am only but a hermit. Your riches are celebrated; I don't even believe in fame. Thus, O King, there is not a great connection between us. You may turn your face from me, but I have no desire for anyone's, let alone your favour."

Given the fact that they had neither the need for riches nor fame (unlike modern day self-styled gurus) what possible rationale could kings have in seeking these ascetics and hermits? The answer is wisdom.

Wisdom was revered by Vedic people. They believed that "Wisdom is truly the most beautiful ornament that a person can possess. It is a thing of value and must be carefully watched, for it brings things much beyond food, fame and blessings. Wisdom is like a friend to a man who travels in distant lands.

It is honoured by the king even more than wealth, and the man who lacks wisdom is but an animal.”

Kautilya in *Arthashastra* advises kings to “... Cast away your pride in the presence of those who are rich in the inward treasury of wisdom; they cannot be robbed by thieves, but their treasure, which is continually increasing, becomes even larger when they share it with the needy and it will not perish even at the end of the world...”

RAJANEETI

What's Politics? What's its intent? How can people be uplifted with politics? Who are the best politicians? What are their innate qualities?

*

At a time when the “best” of political approach seem to be inadequate, it could certainly help to know about the Vedic approach to politics – *Rajaneeti*, where greater good was achieved by inspiring leaders to, first, better themselves. In today's world where we have only narrow ideas of who is a “good politician”; typically is involves corruption free, good character and politically correct and who takes the right decisions. Vedic principles offers insights with significant depth, on what constitutes good governance and hence politicians.

To understand fundamentals of Vedic approach to politics – *Rajaneeti* – it's important to understand five words in *Sanskrit* vis-à-vis *Artha Sutras* mentioned in *Kautilya's Arthashastra*, namely: *Sukham*, *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Rajyam*, and *Indriya-Vijayi*. This is important because these words are often hastily (or bluntly) mistranslated thereby making understanding the greater wisdom – almost, impossible.

Sukham is translated as Happiness. *Dharma* is mistranslated as Religion. *Artha* is translated as Economy. *Rashtra* is taught as ‘Nation’ or ‘Nation-state’ and *Rajyam* is translated as ‘State’. As you will see these translations are only partially correct – at best. The moment you truly understand these five words you will know the core fundamentals of *Rajaneeti* – which also represents the ideas and ideals of good politics.

In his *Arthashastra*, *Kautilya* enlists a series of *Sutras* (formulas). The first five of the *sutras*, mentioned below, forms the foundation of *Rajaneeti*:

1. Objective of life is *Sukham*
2. *Dharma* is foundation of *Sukham*
3. *Artha* is foundation of *Dharma*
4. *Dharma*'s foundation is *Rajyam*
5. *Rajyam*'s are well administered by those who are *Indriya Vijayi*.

1. Objective of life is *Sukham* *Sukham* can be understood in English as Happiness, but it also extends to a state of mental peace dependent on physical wellbeing as defined by a person. To be happy means to experience pleasure, be content, sense of satisfaction, joy, enjoyment and felicity. Everyone has their own perception and ideas about happiness. For some, it is having substantial wealth, a large house, small car or exquisite jewellery. Whatever one thinks can make him/her happy that thing he/she pursues. There is nothing wrong with expecting and working to attain things which you believe will make you happy.

To ensure everyone gets a fair chance to seek their object of happiness is the objective of the political establishment as well as leaders. But when people try to seek their object of happiness by devious means, by hurting others, they are on a sure path to crime. Stopping such crimes, or having it brought to justice when perpetrated, by using every legitimate approach within one's purview is the supreme objective of leaders as well as those in government. Quite simply, when crime goes on unheeded it threatens to disrupt the fabric of society, and jeopardises everyone's well being.

As per *Niti Shastras* (Chanakya) true and blissful happiness is attained when one is bereft of *Arishadvargas* – six natural impediments to happiness

ingrained in humans. These six impediments are *Kama* (Lust), *Krodha* (Anger), *Lobha* (Greed), *Moha* (Infatuation), *Mada* (Ego) and *Matsarya* (Jealousy). If everything one desires is without these six qualities; that desire qualifies to be called as an object of true happiness. If not, that object is the personification of greed, capable of leading to severe consequences when pursued.

Even today, if you observe closely, all the problems facing mankind at micro as well as macro levels are owing to these *Arishadvargas*. *Kautilya* in *Arthashastra* clearly states that one who has conquered these *Arishadvargas* is better qualified to be a leader. He also declares that Leaders with *Arishadvargas* are sure to cause not just their doom but the collapse of the institution they serve. Such leaders are to be shunned.

The leaders who have conquered themselves are well equipped to handle one's adversaries and enemies. It is not possible to conquer others until one has conquered oneself. This is the eternal truth.

Having conquered the six natural impediments, it is also the duty of the leader to guide his people on the path of wisdom, health, wealth and prosperity. Knowledge and information are key tools, but wisdom is the power of the leaders. It is with this wisdom that better self, family, society, city, state, nation as well as the better world can be made possible.

By realizing the fact that objective of life is the pursuit of happiness and not greed – leaders determine their destiny of themselves as well as their people.

2. Dharma is the foundation of Sukham As it has already been stated, *Dharma* is not religion but is a principle that sustains oneself and also society.

The pursuit of happiness or Sukham is possible when both an individual and society is sustained and there is opportunity for peace and prosperity. For an individual, his *Dharma* is a play of the roles he dons, and in playing each of his roles to the best of his ability, mental peace and well being can be assured. For example, a man can be an individual, son, brother, husband, father, kinsman, worker and citizen at the same time. Each role carries within it a duty in the lowest sense, but a sense of purpose and an act of love in the highest sense. When an individual carries out these various roles, and correspondingly all members of society carry out their roles, there is happiness for all.

3. Artha is the root of Dharma The word *Artha* appears in the earliest of Vedic scriptures, including *Rig Veda*, where it connotes purpose, goal or aim of human life. Over a period *Artha* evolved into a broader concept, it was first included as a part of *Trivarga* – three objectives of human life (viz. *Dharma*, *Artha*, and *Kama*), which evolved into *Chaturvarga* – four objectives of human life (viz. *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha*).

Chaturvarga is also known as *Purushartha* – literally meaning ‘Objectives of human pursuit’ are universal for human beings. *Dharma* is the principle or objective that sustained life, *Artha* is prosperity in all forms which also give meaning to life, *Kama* is work (of all nature, even sex) that provides enjoyment but which require *Artha* (resources or meaning) and *Moksha* is self realization or an eternal state of bliss. In the original Vedic philosophy each of the *Chaturvarga* is gained by first attaining the preceding one.

Chanakya suggested a different view, i.e. *Artha* makes *Dharma* possible.

No individual can ever lead a purposeful as well as productive life without realising their *Purushartha*; it was also a means of self realisation. When it is followed there is balance within individuals, institutions as well as

nations. When it is disregarded everyone is infested with confusion or chaos, possibly anarchy.

At the social level, *Artha* implies social, legal, economic and worldly affairs. Therefore, all Vedic treatises relating to these subjects are called as *Arthashastra*.

Vedic sage *Jaimini* defines *Artha* as a “quintessential element for all round growth...” The word *Artha* also translates to meaning, goal, purpose as well as essence. But *Artha* also has a broader concept in Vedic thought. As a concept, it implies means of life, activities as well as resources which enable us to be in a position we want to be. While wealth is an important part of *Artha*, wealth which is seldom used for the betterment of oneself, one’s family or others is considered *Anartha* (misfortune). Economists too agree, although subconsciously, with *Kautilya* that wealth has only either of four ends, namely: be spent for the rightful purpose, be donated to the deserving individuals or institutions, and misused by spending for devious & nefarious objects or simply to be robbed. The first two of the end deserves to be part of *Artha* system; since it respects *Dharma*, in which case wealth is used to fulfil ones *Dharma*. The last two, since verily against *Dharma* are called *Adharma* (against *Dharma*) as well as *Anartha*. *Artha* can be better understood as the rightful accumulation of resources and wealth for a happy and prosperous wellbeing.

We all understand the importance of wealth; without wealth, a great many things in life aren’t possible. However, to attain wealth rightfully (*Artha*) there needs to be a sound economy, for the sound economy to happen there needs to be job/entrepreneurial avenues and for this peace is necessary. Peace is made possible by *Dharma*, when everyone does the duties assigned to them from a sense of responsibility. While they are interrelated in many

ways – Vedic thinkers, including *Kautilya*, hold *Dharma* to be greater than *Artha*.

Therefore, leaders must understand the importance of economy (*Artha*) in carrying out their duties and achieve their objective for everyone's wellbeing (*Dharma*).

Without *Artha*, there cannot be followers of *Dharma* and without adherence to *Dharma* there can seldom be *Sukham* – This is the Truth.

4. Foundation of *Artha* is *Rajyam* The Sanskrit word *Rajyam* is often confused with the word *Rashtram* or *Rashtra*. Also, the word *Rashtra* is often translated as 'Nation' or 'Nation-state' and *Rajyam* as 'State'. The word 'Nation' as well as 'Nation-State' is understood today by many from a European perspective. Nation is defined to be a body of people united by common descent, history or language, which inhabit a particular state or territory. 'Nation-state' is understood as to be a state that identifies itself as deriving its political legitimacy from serving as a sovereign entity for a nation or as a sovereign territorial unit. The state is a political and geopolitical entity; the nation is a cultural and/or ethnic entity. The term "Nation-State" implies that the two geographically coincide. In a subtle sense, nation-state is any group of people having a common aspiration of a political state like an organization. It is also essentially based on divisive sentiments.

It's important to note that, even today, many people believe that the idea of Nation or Nation-State was seldom known to Vedic Indians and, that, the idea of Nation-State came into existence hardly two centuries ago. The British, who ruled India for over 2 centuries, often made such observations, repeatedly. One often quoted statement is by Sir John Strachey^[1] – a member of the Council of Secretary of State of British Government – in his

speech to British Parliament in 1888: This is the first and most essential thing to learn about India that there is not and never was an India or even any country of India possessing, according to European ideas, any sort of unity, physical, political, social or religious. No Indian nation, no people of India of which we hear so much.

In India, the concept of nation existed for thousands of years in the form of a pan-Indian spiritual-emotional identity. In *Rig Veda*, the word *Rashtram* was used to describe the national identity of people of the land called *Aryavarttha* – as India was known then. *Rashtram* is a unifying, as well as an overall development oriented concept as against the prevailing concept of nation, in which the basic urge to live together is not necessarily developed. *Rajyam*, in this context, is better translated as the government or rule – which includes the ruler, judiciary, banking, military as well as other social welfare establishments to ensure that objective of *Dharma*, is relentlessly pursued.

Rajyam is a spiritual, all-inclusive, welfare of all system based on the idea of *Dharma*. The foundation and the meaning behind it are never divisive. *Rajyam* can evolve, adapt or even collapse, but the idea of *Rashtra*, which originates from the benign wish for eternal welfare – *Dharma* can continue to exist until there is an urge to live and co-exist in the hearts of the people.

For Economy (*Artha*) to flourish – Government (*Rajyam*) is an important precursor. With good governance comes good economy (*Artha*); through good economy comes good opportunities for people (*Artha*); through such good opportunities *Dharma* is nourished and through nourishing of *Dharma* – *Sukham* is ensured.

5. *Rajyam* is well administered by those who are *Indriya Vijayi* *Indriya Vijayi* is one who has overcome own over his *Indriya* (sensory perceptions).

Indriya is often translated as “belonging to, or agreeable to, *Indra* (ruler of *Indriya*)”. However, *Indriya* essentially connotes supremacy, dominance, control, power, and strength. Other relevant words could also be ‘predominating influence’, ‘sovereignty’, ‘power’, ‘organ’, ‘faculty’, ‘controlling faculty’, ‘controlling principle’, ‘directive force as well as function’.

Abidharmakosha, although a revered text by the Buddhist monks, was originally written in *Sanskrit* language and has its root in *Dharma Shastras*, written in the 3rd century BCE this text list 22 *Indriyas*. They are:

1. *Chakshushendriya* – Organ of sight, eye
2. *Shrotendriya* – Organ of hearing, ears
3. *Ghranendriya* – Organ of smell, nose
4. *Jihvendriya* – Organ of taste, tongue
5. *Kayendriya* – Organ of touch, body
6. *Manendriya* – Mental organ, brain
7. *Strindriya* – Female organ
8. *Purushendriya* – Sensation of dissatisfaction or sorrow, mental
9. *Jivitendriya* – Vital organs, life
10. *Dukhendriya* – Sensation of displeasure, pain or suffering.
Bodily.
11. *Sukhendriya* – Sensation of pleasure, bodily
12. *Daurmanasendriya* – Sensation of dissatisfaction, mental.
13. *Saumanasendriya* – Faculty of satisfaction or joy, mental
14. *Upekshendriya* – Faculty of sensation of indifference; bodily as well as mental
15. *Shraddhendriya* – Faculty of faith, Confidence
16. *Virendriya* – Faculty of energy, zeal, enthusiasm
17. *Smritendriya* – Faculty of memory, mindfulness

18. *Samdhindriya* – Faculty of absorption, meditation
19. *Prajnendriya* – Faculty of discernment of Dharma, Wisdom
20. *Anajnatamajnasyamindriya* – Faculty of learning
21. *Ajnendriya* – Faculty of knowledge, of highest knowledge, of having learned
22. *Ajnataadvindriya* – Faculty of one who has already come know, of perfect knowledge

Of these 22 *Indriyas*, first five are the most important in the material life of any individual. If a person cannot control his own *Indriyas*; that person will ever be a slave to them. While being a slave these very *Indriyas* create delusion in men. As said by *Krishna* in *Bhagavad-Gita* “Through delusion comes anger, this anger causes bewilderment of memory, through bewilderment of memory wrong decisions are taken and through wrong decisions the person verily meets his end.” Therefore, controlling these *Indriyas* are extremely important for political leaders as well. For achieving this, the Vedic *rishis* have offered three paths, namely:

1. *Vichara* – Deliberation, Contemplation or Self-inquiry
2. *Ichhashakti* – Inner will
3. *Kumbhaka* – Retention of breath through Pranayama (Breathing exercises^[2] that are a part of *Yoga*)
4. *Dama* – Restraint

For those essentially in material pursuits of life, like politics and business, *Vichara* is considered the most viable path.

Vichara, like many other words does not have a corresponding word in the English language, the closest word could be Deliberation, Contemplation or Self-inquiry. It is a faculty of discriminating between the right and wrong; it is the process of deliberation about cause and effect (*Karma*) as well as the

final analysis. *Vichara*, as per *Ramana Maharshi*, can always be practiced. However, as per his teachings “*Vichara* should not be regarded as a meditation practice that takes place at certain hours and in certain positions; it should continue throughout one’s waking hours, irrespective of what one is doing. There is no conflict between working and *Vichara* and with a little practice everyone can inculcate it in their lives.”

People take to some or the other kind of work to fulfil their desires, need or greed. A great many people give little thought as to whether what they are doing is correct, effective or worthy of the efforts. Then there are those who take significant time to think in a way as to see if their self-serving objectives are satisfied. Worse, there are also such people who only think and never do a thing. Neither of these is capable of even understanding *Vichara*.

Vichara is a constant thought for self as well as for universal welfare. *Vichara* is for those who are on the path of *Dharma*. *Vichara* is then for those are free of or aspire to be free of *Arishadvargas*.

Through the practice of such *Vichara* a person – in due course of time – will ultimately realize ways to conquer oneself and become *Indriya Vijayi*.

This *Indriya Vijayi* is well equipped to ensure competent governance (*Rajyam*). Through well served *Rajyam*, economic welfare is achieved (*Artha*). Through *Artha* – *Dharma* is followed by all. And, thereby, through *Dharma*, universal welfare is achieved (*Sukham*). This is the core foundation of *Rajaneeti* – Vedic approach to *Politics*.

ATTAINING ABSOLUTE POWER

*What is true power? Is it possible to be powerful?
What makes a person weak? Who's truly powerful?
Who's truly weak?*

*

Power is usually looked upon in an external sense. It is defined as the capability of accomplishing something or exerting influence over someone with a goal in mind. Power is sometimes referred to as a political or executive ability, and is the marked ability to do or act with decisiveness, might and force. It can be often delegated authority, authority granted to a person in an office or capacity. It isn't necessarily something tangible, and isn't something one can buy exclusively with money.

Today, what most people consider a seat of power—or, power by position—is most the feeble and temporary one. Yet, it is an addictive type of energy that takes a lot, both from those who aspire to it as well those who occupy its status. It is a purely outward power that may not include any power over oneself. If it is a position of power that is won or given, it can just as easily be quickly lost or taken away.

One of the revered Vedic seers, *Bhartrihari*, who was a king before deciding to become a hermit, said that fear is everywhere and in every person in the absence of supreme wisdom. While the weak fear the powerful, the powerful fear the loss of power. *Bhartrihari* says in *Niti Shataka*, “In enjoyment, there is fear of disease. In social position, there is

fear of disgrace. In wealth, there is fear of taxation. In honour, there is fear of humiliation. In power, there is fear of foeman. In beauty, there is a fear of old age. In erudition, there is fear of criticism. In virtue, there is a fear of insults. In body, fear of death...”

If you think that the chair of the president of United States is the most powerful in the world, you might want to consider that it can be occupied by a person for not more than eight years and requires regular approval from other branches of government, the media and the voter. Given this fact, even the chair of the President of United States of America doesn't guarantee absolute power. There have been times when sitting presidents have had to step down in disgrace, have gotten killed and even humiliated. Like all powers, such political prominence is transitory. But then, is there really something called absolute power, by which a person could take on the mightiest?

Absolute power, that which Vedic seers like *Chanakya*, *Bhoja*, *Bhartrihari* and *Bhardwaj* taught, is that which makes a man brave and fearless. In the presence of fear, there can seldom be any enduring power. In life, all fears must be uprooted before we make place for power. Whether power is to be used in material or spiritual pursuits, uprooting the fear is the key.

Fears are caused by six inborn limitations in men called '*Arishadvargas*', which come to people naturally because of the excess of the mind. In lust, we fear not having or, when having, losing the object of our desire. We are infested with anger owing to our fear of losing what we have and those who would try to take it from us. Greed occurs when we fear too much about the future. In fear of the future (what is going to come) we seek to accumulate material things beyond our present needs at times through devious means. Infatuation is often a cause of emotional pain, and anticipation of pain is the

cause of fear. Egoistic people often seek too much appreciation, acceptance and publicity, most of the time undeservingly, and therefore fear not having it or losing it. Envy and jealousy too make way for fear. When someone has something, that which we don't possess, we envy them in fear that we may never get that which they have or that they may outdo us.

All the so-called 'most powerful people', labelled by media publications, are infested with these *Arishadvargas*. Yet, we are made to believe that they are powerful owing to these very limitations - roots of peril. Vedic seers declared that in the presence of any or all *Arishadvargas*, a person is only weak. So, to be powerful, a person must first overcome his fears by overcoming those six perils. This is a matter of developing self-control and cannot be achieved by controlling others or external resources.

The Vedic word for power is *Shakti*. *Shakti* comes from the root word 'Shak', which means 'to be able'. There are five manifestations of this *Shakti*, which truly makes a man powerful. They are:

1. *Chit Shakti*: the power of consciousness
2. *Ananda Shakti*: the power of unconditional bliss
3. *Ikcha Shakti*: the power of unimpeded will
4. *Jnana Shakti*: the power of intuitive knowledge
5. *Kriya Shakti*: the power of acting as per one's will

These are inner powers that cannot be gained through manipulating others. They arise from *Yoga Shakti* or *Power of Yoga*. It is through appropriate use of the aforesaid *Shakti* that a person becomes powerful enough to carry out the following:

1. *Srushti*: manifestation
2. *Stithi*: sustenance
3. *Samhara*: dissolution (end of a negative event)

4. *Tirodhana*: concealment

5. *Anugraha*: benevolence

No person is truly powerful unless he can carry on these five tasks. Yet these are universal functions, not something any person can own or dispense of their own accord.

Once people achieve worldly power, they are addicted to it and are eventually overwhelmed by it. They seek enjoyment by abusing them, even while in the grip of fear of losing it. This causes their downfall. Many seers of Vedic origin have propounded that getting power is far easier than holding on to it.

Power, as per Vedic wisdom, has three major limitations. They are: *Dukhamishritham* (it's filled with sorrow), *Atriptikaratvam* (it leads to dissatisfaction) and *Bhandhakatvam* (it makes the possessor its slave). All these limitations makes a person more prone to anger. From anger, comes delusion. From delusion arises failure of judgement. From failure of judgement, comes loss of understanding. And from loss of understanding comes destruction.

Modern history is replete with stories of leaders who have often been overwhelmed by the power they possessed and eventually lost everything to it.

Therefore, Vedic scriptures recommend that a *Shakta* (possessor of power) must seek silence, vows of austerity, wisdom, study, solace, meditation, retrospection and introspection. When these seven aren't adhered to, his *Shakti* leaves him thereby causing his peril. These practises are recommended as they further enhance awareness and forethought, necessary when one has power and must use it wisely. They further serve to be safeguards against the *Arishadvargas*.

Shakti is also regarded as the mother or *Maatrika*. There are essentially seven *Maatrikas* (or *Saptamaatrikaas*) in the Vedas:

1. *Brahmani*: power of creation
2. *Vaishnavi*: power of sustenance
3. *Maheshwari*: power of destruction
4. *Indrani*: power of self-control
5. *Kaumari*: power of wisdom
6. *Varahi*: power of wealth
7. *Chamunda*: power of fearlessness

These *Saptamaatrikaas* have been revered by Vedic people since time immemorial in pursuit of a power to overcome human pains, propagate truths, sustain wisdom as well as achieve liberation.

Therefore, without inner power, outer power is just an illusion and brings as much danger as prestige. Inner power may not require outer power, but outer power is dependent on the inner power of an individual to sustain itself. True power comes from one's good karma, in which one becomes a conduit of nature's energies. Abuse of power is bound to cause peril, not just to the person but his position as well.

14

WEALTH

What is wealth? How to attain it? Why are some people poorer than others? Is there a truthful and sincere way to earn wealth?

*

Wealth is defined in be to an abundance of valuable possessions or money or resources. In olden times, wealth was associated with the land and labour which consequently produced objects for fulfilling the needs and wants of society. In popular usage, wealth is understood as an abundance of items of transactional value. Unfortunately, in today's world wealth has become synonymous with money and property. This is the primary reason why a large part of populace suffers unnecessary poverty and the rich often become corrupt.

Vedic philosophy has a phenomenal understanding about the real meaning of “wealth” and abundance in life. They called it *Lakshmi*. She is not simply the “Goddess” who is depicted in temples across the country. Although the image of the Goddess was certainly inspired by this science, *Lakshmi* in the true sense is the Vedic science of wealth that enables people to understand, attain and sustain abundance and prosperity, at both outer and inner levels of life.

The word *Lakshmi* is derived from the *Sanskrit* terms: *lak ṣ* and *lak ṣ a* – meaning respectively “to perceive, observe, know, and understand” and

“goal, aim, objective”. The word *Lakshmi* can be best understood as knowing and understanding one’s goal. *Lakshmi* finds mention in *Rig Veda* only once but the related term *Sri* is common for wealth and abundance. In *Yajur Veda* and *Atharva Veda*, *Lakshmi* becomes a complex concept with plural manifestations.

Vedic teachings define four primary objectives of human life: *Dharma* (Duty), *Artha* (Wealth), *Kama* (Desire) and *Moksha* (Liberation), to be pursued in that order. Vedic wisdom suggests that an individual must address one’s desires during youth years and it only then possible to become detached and strive towards liberation as one grows old. Though there are exceptions to this rule, however in most cases, failure to fulfil desires in youth tends to cause repression and an over powering urge to enjoy the remainder of life in old age, mostly the clinging to power during retirement stems from this. Liberation is best attained with full renunciation but to renounce one must have first achieved something tangible in the first place. Paupers have little to renounce. Although *Moksha* is not seriously sought after by many people today; *Artha* and *Kama* are eagerly sought by the greater majority of people, often without any concern for either *Dharma* or *Moksha*.

Lakshmi, or wealth, is best understood in her 8 forms, namely:

1. ***Adi Lakshmi (Primary wealth):*** *No matter how, where and when you are born you have some wealth and resources with you. Primarily this is your health, family, culture and education. Vedic teachings say that you must first be aware of what you have, then understand how to build on it for further wealth. If you do not understand what you already have – you will never understand what you need to get or how to achieve it. We often find that*

people who complain, cry and curse their “fate” remain losers in life. Those who work without complaints or qualms, on the other hand, make great strides and go far, regardless of the poor circumstances they may have come from. *Adi* means first, so the first step for wealth is to understand yourself, then the people and things immediately around you.

2. ***Dhana Lakshmi (Monetary wealth):*** After understanding the resources around you, you are better placed to make the use of them to generate a product or a service which will help you achieve monetary gains leading to *Dhana Lakshmi*, so that you are not dependent upon anyone and have time and resources to do what you want.
3. ***Dhanya Lakshmi (Wealth of Grains):*** With money, you buy the necessary food to give you physical strength and vitality for greater efforts in life.
4. ***Veera Lakshmi (Wealth of Courage):*** With your strong body, knowledge and money by your side, to attain greater abundance in life you must have courage and be willing to exert yourself. It takes great courage to attain something which people around you consider you incapable of achieving. By having knowledge, food and money with you already, you are in a better position to attain the wealth of courage.
5. ***Gaja Lakshmi (wealth of power and prestige):*** Through the appropriate application of knowledge, money, food and courage – the wealth of power becomes accessible to you. This power can be social, political, intellectual or even spiritual, allowing you to influence the world for good or bad.

6. **Santana Lakshmi (wealth of offspring):** *With knowledge, money, food, courage and power you are in a better position to take of others and gain a following: to have and adequately care for a progeny (Santana) in the broader sense of the term. It is only by having the right progeny that you can create a sustainable family as well as a supportive society, allowing your influence in the world to be perpetuated. Therefore, you seek Santana Lakshmi.*
7. **Aishwarya Lakshmi (Wealth of affluence and endowment):** *Having a following it becomes necessary that you provide them with adequate resources to secure their future. You can be a helpful benefactor using the wealth that you have acquired. For this you ask and work towards Aishwarya Lakshmi. You can help bring the wealth of Lakshmi to others.*
8. **Vijaya Lakshmi (Wealth of victory):** *Once you've attained the previous seven aspects of Lakshmi, you are in a great position to pursue anything in life and Vijaya Lakshmi is all by your side in your pursuits. You can overcome all opposition and go beyond every obstacle. You can even conquer your own desires*

In *Lakshmi's* iconography, she is either sitting or standing on a lotus and typically carrying a lotus in one or two hands. The lotus represents reality, consciousness, *karma* (work, deed), knowledge as well as Self-realization – the desired goal that you wish to unfold. The lotus, a flower that can blossom in dirty water, symbolizes purity and beauty regardless of the good or bad circumstances in which it grows. It is a reminder that wealth and prosperity can bloom even in difficult surroundings. Therefore, if you so desire you can create wealth even in an economy where opportunities are bleak, and chances of success seem dim. And you can achieve an inner

sense of abundance regardless of your circumstances. Such is the wisdom of Vedic wealth – *Lakshmi*.

15

VEDIC WISDOM

What is it?

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Vedic *Vigyaan*, often mistranslated as science, is Wisdom. Wisdom is that which comes essentially with retrospection and constant meditation on knowledge with relation to life experiences. It is not solipsism, where only personal experience is valued; rather it is essentially practical knowledge. It enables one to find balance and peace of mind amid all the chaos and confusion in the world outside. Wisdom is the ultimate objective of Vedic knowledge. Wisdom is also the end of suffering.

Vedic Wisdom is not some extreme philosophical or metaphysical subject. It is a very practical one.

It is only through wisdom that one realises that one is the *Atman*, housed in the body for an amount of time and going through certain experiences that on the surface seem to be beyond control.

The Vedic wisdom suggests that all beings – animals including – are potentially divine; that they are in essence pure conscious energies. And each has the right to determine their destiny by actions. That only by the sum of right actions that right destiny can be brought.

What is then the root cause of one's suffering? It is one's own actions brought on by thought patterns. The thought patterns find their roots in the *Arishadvargas*, which in turn finds its root in the feeling of being a small

entity in creation. This feeling of lack of power, but a desire to grow, is the key to all problems. Should one then not want to expand or want to grow in a metaphorical sense? This is not possible, as all human life is a desire for connection to something larger. New parents and new lovers are ideal examples, one finds greater joy when connected to another being, becoming a part of something larger than a singular limited existence. All acquisitions are also a means to expand our limited identity; most owners of cars say, they see their personality in their vehicles. This greater cause then becomes the impetus for the growth of self. *Yogis* too have this desire; they connect with everything and everyone. The entire world is then their family. Their consciousness then enlarges beyond their existence. Because they understand that at the core we are only consciousness, there is only One, and the feeling of powerlessness is transcended.

What about the common man, is there hope for him?

Is there a means by which the natural impediments and lack of power can be addressed? Yes, it can though the many processes of *Yoga*, with the aim of becoming a *Yogi*.

What is the benefit in becoming a *Yogi*? One gains a better perspective on life not just in the spiritual sense but also materialistically. One understands about problem solving, governance, about power, wealth and what constitutes each.

But these are just hints into what the Vedas have to offer.

The questions that might follow include:

It is true? Can I really always be happy? Can I gain material and spiritual success in a definite way? Is there a method or process I can follow? Has it

been done many times before? Can it be individualised to me? Is success guaranteed?

To this the Vedas answer: YES

Practicality of Vedic Wisdom

Is it possible?

*

People often say that in theory Vedic wisdom is good but question if it's practical? If it was impracticable, it would not have survived. The Vedic wisdom, therefore, must be intensely practical for us to be able to follow it in our day to day lives.

Shvetaketu was the son of *Aaruni*, a sage, a recluse. Brought up in the forest he once visited the city of the *Panchaalas* and appeared at the court of the king, *Pravaahana Jaivali*. The king asked him, "Do you know how beings depart hence at death?" "No, sir." "Do you know how they return hither?" "No, sir." "Do you know the way of the fathers and the way of the gods?" "No, sire." Then the king asked other questions. *Shvetaketu* could not answer any of them. So, the king told him that he knew nothing. The boy went back to his father, and the father admitted that he himself could not answer these questions. It was not that he was unwilling to answer these questions. It was not that he was unwilling to teach the boy, but he did not know these things. So, *Shvetaketu* went to the king and asked to be taught these secrets. The king said that these things had been hitherto known only among kings; the priests never knew them. He, however, proceeded to teach him what he desired to know.

In various *Upanishads*, we find that this Vedic wisdom is not the outcome of meditation in the forests only, but is also the thoughts and insights gained

by people who were involved in everyday life, the common man. We cannot conceive any man can be busier than a monarch, a man who is ruling over millions of people, and yet, some of these rulers were deep thinkers.

Everything goes to show that this philosophy must be very practical; and later on, when we come to the *Bhagavad-Gita* it is the best commentary we have on the Vedic philosophy — curiously enough the scene is laid on the battlefield, where *Krishna* teaches this philosophy to *Arjuna*; and the doctrine which stands out luminously in every page of the *Gita* is intense activity, but in the midst of it, eternal calmness. This is the secret of work, to attain which is the goal of the Vedic seers.

Inactivity, as we understand it in the sense of passivity, certainly cannot be the goal. Were it so, then the walls around us would be the most intelligent; they are inactive. Clods of earth, stumps of trees, would be the greatest sages in the world; they are inactive. Nor does inactivity become activity when it is combined with passion. Real activity, which is the goal of Vedas, is combined with eternal calmness, the calmness which cannot be ruffled, the balance of mind which is never disturbed, whatever happens. And we all know from our experience in life that that is the best attitude for work.

Now, how we can work if we do not have the passion which we generally feel for work. It's only with experience we find that it is not true. The less passion there is, the better we work. The calmer we are, the better for us, and more amount of work we can do. When we let lose our composure, we waste energy, shatter our nerves, disturb our minds, and accomplish very little work. The energy which ought to have gone out as work is spent as mere feeling, which counts for nothing. It is only when the mind is very calm and collected that all of its energy is spent in doing good work. And if you read the lives of the great workers which the world has produced, you

will find that they were wonderfully calm men. Nothing, as it were, could throw them off their balance.

That is why the man who becomes angry never does a great amount of work, and the man whom nothing can make angry accomplishes so much. The man, who gives way to anger, or hatred, or any other passion, cannot work; he only breaks himself to pieces, and does nothing practical. It is the calm, forgiving, equable, well-balanced mind that does the greatest amount of work.

There are two tendencies in human nature: one to harmonise the ideal with the life, and the other to elevate the life to the ideal. It is a great thing to understand this, for the former tendency is the temptation of our lives. We think that we can only do a certain class of work. Most of it, perhaps, is bad; most of it, perhaps, has a motive power of passion behind it, anger, or greed, or selfishness. Now if any person comes to preach to me a certain ideal, the first step towards which is to give up selfishness, to give up self-enjoyment, I think that is impractical. But when a man brings an ideal which can be reconciled with my selfishness, I am glad at once and jump at it. That is the ideal for me.

So to with practicality. What I think is practical, is to me the only practicality. The difference between weakness and strength is one of degree; the difference between virtue and vice is one of degree, the difference between heaven and hell is one of degree, the difference between life and death is one of degree, all differences in this world are of degree, and not of kind, because oneness is the secret of everything. All is One, which manifests Itself, either as thought, or life, or *Atman*, or body, and the difference is only in degree. As such, we have no right to look down with

contempt upon those who are not developed exactly in the same degree as we are.

Condemn none; if you can stretch out a helping hand, do so. If you cannot, fold your hands, bless your brothers, and let them go their own way. Dragging down and condemning is not the way to work. Never is work accomplished in that way. We spend our energies in condemning others. Criticism and condemnation is a vain way of spending our energies, for in the long run we come to learn that all are seeing the same thing, are approaching the same ideal, and that most of our differences are merely differences of expression.

There may be weakness, says the Vedic wisdom, but never mind, we want to grow. Disease was found out as soon as man was born. Everyone knows his disease; it requires no one to tell us what our diseases are. But thinking all the time that we are diseased will not cure us — medicine is necessary. We may forget anything outside, we may try to become hypocrites to the external world, but in our heart of hearts we all know our weaknesses. But, says the Vedic wisdom, being reminded of weakness does not help much; give strength, and strength does not come by thinking of weakness all the time. The remedy for weakness is not brooding over weakness, but thinking of strength. Teach men of the strength that is already within them. Instead of telling them they are sinners, the Vedic wisdom takes the opposite position, and says, "You are pure and perfect, and what you call sin does not belong to you." Sins are very low degrees of Self-manifestation; manifest your Self in a high degree. That is the one thing to remember; all of us can do that.

Never say, "No", never say, "I cannot", for you are infinite. Even time and space are as nothing compared with your nature. You can do anything and

everything, you are almighty. These are the principles of ethics, but we shall now come down lower and work out the details. We shall see how this Vedic wisdom can be carried into our everyday life, the city life, the country life, the national life, and the home life of every nation. For, if a religion cannot help man wherever he may be, wherever he stands, it is not of much use; it will remain only a theory for the chosen few. Religion, to help mankind, must be ready and able to help him in whatever condition he is, in servitude or in freedom, in the depths of degradation or on the heights of purity; everywhere, equally, it should be able to come to his aid. The principles of Vedic wisdom, or the ideal of religion, or whatever you may call it, will be fulfilled by its capacity for performing this great function.

The ideal of faith in ourselves is of the greatest help to us. If faith in ourselves had been more extensively taught and practiced, I am sure a very large portion of the evils and miseries that we have would have vanished. Throughout the history of mankind, if any motive power has been more potent than another in the lives of all great men and women, it is that of faith in themselves. Born with the consciousness that they were to be great, they became great. Let a man go down as low as possible; there must come a time when out of sheer desperation he will take an upward curve and will learn to have faith in himself. But it is better for us that we should know it from the very first. Why should we have all these bitter experiences in order to gain faith in ourselves? We can see that all the difference between men is owing to the existence or non-existence of faith in himself. Faith in ourselves will do everything.

Even an atheist believes, be it in the power of science or in the absence of god, or even in himself. Who believes in nothing is then another form of being; requiring constant experience or proof, life is then paranoia. Vedic wisdom is not about self-serving faith, but is the doctrine of oneness. It

means faith in all, because you are all. Love for yourself means love for all, love for animals, love for everything, for you are all one. It is the great faith which will make the world better.

Do you know how much energy, how many powers, how many forces are still lurking behind that frame of yours? What scientist has known all that is in man? Millions of years have passed since man first came here and yet but one infinitesimal part of his powers has been manifested. Therefore, you must not say that you are weak. How do you know what possibilities lay behind that degradation on the surface? You know but little of that which is within you. For behind you are the ocean of infinite power and blessedness.

"This *Atman* is first to be heard of." Hear day and night that you are that Soul. Repeat it to yourselves day and night till it enters into your very veins, till it tingles in every drop of blood, till it is in your flesh and bone. Let the whole body be full of that one ideal, "I am the birth-less, the deathless, the blissful, the omniscient, the omnipotent, ever-glorious Soul." Think on it day and night; think on it till it becomes part and parcel of your life. Meditate upon it, and out of that will come work. "Out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks," and out of the fullness of the heart the hand works. Action will come. Fill yourselves with the ideal; whatever you do, think well on it. All your actions will be magnified, transformed, deified, by the very power of the thought. If matter is powerful, thought is omnipotent. Bring this thought to bear upon your life, fill yourselves with the thought of your almightiness, your majesty, and your glory.

These are sometimes terrible doctrines to teach. Some get frightened at these ideas, but for those who want to be practical, this is the first thing to learn. Never tell yourselves or others that you are weak. Do good if you can, but do not injure the world. You know in your inmost heart that many

of your limited ideas, this humbling of yourself and praying and weeping to imaginary beings are superstitions. Tell me one case where these prayers have been answered. All the answers that came were from your own hearts. You know there are no ghosts, but no sooner are you in the dark than you feel a little creepy sensation. That is so because in our childhood we have had all these fearful ideas put into our heads. But do not teach these things to others through fear of society and public opinion, through fear of incurring the hatred of friends, or for fear of losing cherished superstitions. Be masters of all these. What is there to be taught more in religion than the oneness of the universe and faith in one's self? All the works of mankind for thousands of years past have been towards this one goal, and mankind is yet working it out. It is your turn now and you already know the truth.

To be able to use what we call *Viveka* (discrimination), to learn how in every moment of our lives, in every one of our actions, to discriminate between what is right and wrong, true and false, we shall have to know the test of truth, which is purity, oneness. Everything that makes for oneness is truth. Love is truth, and hatred is false, because hatred makes for multiplicity. It is hatred that separates man from man; therefore, it is wrong and false. It is a disintegrating power; it separates and destroys.

There is nothing as strengthening as humility, a humble man, renouncing his own self yields to wisdom.

Man has all that he requires if Wisdom dwells in him. For Wisdom to dwell in us, we must do only one thing: diminish ourselves in order to give place to Wisdom. As soon as man has diminished himself, Wisdom enters and dwells in him. Therefore in order to have all that is needful to him, man must first humble himself.

The more deeply man penetrates into self, and the more insignificant he appears to himself, the higher he rises towards Wisdom.

He who worships pride flees from his heart even as the light of a camp fire before the rays of the sun. He whose heart is pure and in whom there is no pride, he who is humble, constant and simple, who looks upon every creature as upon his friend and love every one as his own, he who treats every creature with equal tenderness and love, he who would do good and has abandoned vanity – in his heart dwells the wisdom of life.

Even as the earth is adorned with beautiful plants which she brings forth, even so is he adorned in whose soul dwells the Lord of life.

Many think that if we eliminate the biases of personality and the love of them out of our life nothing would remain. They imagine that there is no life without likes and dislikes. But this seems so only to people who have never experienced the joys of self-renunciation. Eliminate the biases of personality from life, renounce them and that which remains forms the substance of life – love which yields positive happiness.

The more man recognizes his spiritual self and the more he renounces unwanted aspects of his personality, the more truly he understands himself.

It is therefore very important to appreciate good thoughts, your own as well as that of others, as soon as you recognize them. Nothing will aid you as much as good thoughts in the accomplishment of the true task of your life.

Be master of your thoughts if you would attain your purpose. Fix the glance of your *Atman* upon that one pure light which is free from passions.

When misfortune befalls on you know that they are not due to what you have done, but to what you have thought.

If we cannot restrain ourselves from committing a deed which we know is evil, it is because we first permitted ourselves to think of this evil act and failed to restrain our thoughts. Strive not to think of things which you believe to be evil.

More injurious than evil acts are those thoughts which lead to evil acts. An evil act need not be repeated and it could be – at times – repented. But evil thoughts give birth to evil deeds. An evil act points the path to other evil acts. Evil thoughts drag you along upon the path to evil deeds.

Fruit is born of a seed. Even so deeds are born of thoughts. Even as evil fruit is born of evil seed, so evil acts are born of evil thoughts. As a farmer separates good and true seed from the seed of weeds, and selects from among the good seed the choicest and guards and sorts it; even so a prudent man treats his thoughts; he repels vain and foolish thoughts, and preserves the good thoughts, cherishing and assorting them. If you do not repel evil thoughts, nor cherish good thoughts, you simply cannot avoid evil acts. Good deeds come from good thoughts only. Cherish good thoughts, searching for them in books of wisdom, in sensible conversation and above all in your inner self.

For a lamp to give steady light it must be placed where it is protected from the wind. But if a lamp is in a windy place, the light will flicker and cast strange and dark shadows. Similarly, uncontrolled, foolish and ill-assorted thoughts cast strange and dark shadows upon men.

When the light of wisdom is being extinguished, the dark shadows of your bodily desires fall across your path – beware of these dreadful shadows; the light of your spirit cannot dissipate their darkness until you expel the desires of the body from your soul.

Just as a candle cannot burn without a fire, men cannot thrive without wisdom. The *Atman* dwells in all beings, but not all beings are aware of this. Happy is the life of him who knows this, and unhappy is his life who does not know it.

Even your shadow lives and vanishes. That which is eternal you – *Atman* – that which has reason, does not belong to the evanescent life. This eternal principle is within you, transport yourself into it, and it will reveal unto you that which is life and all that which is true and all that which you need to know. It will even guarantee you a life of perpetual bliss filled with health, wealth and prosperity to the brim.

[1] Bridging The Gap: Essays on Inclusive Development and Education ,edited by Latha Pillai, Babu Remesh ,SAGE Publications India, 8 Nov 2011

[2] Breathing exercises have an important place in Yoga, as breathing patterns indicate the mental state and physical health of a person. For this reason, numerous breathing exercises are suggested in Ashtanga Yoga so as to bring the mind (and body) under control via the breath. These are best learnt under a qualified teacher who can guide and suggest exercises based on the unique requirement and physical/ mental health of the student.